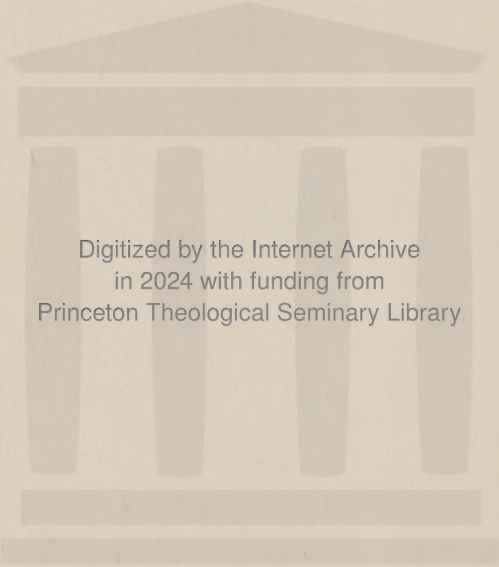


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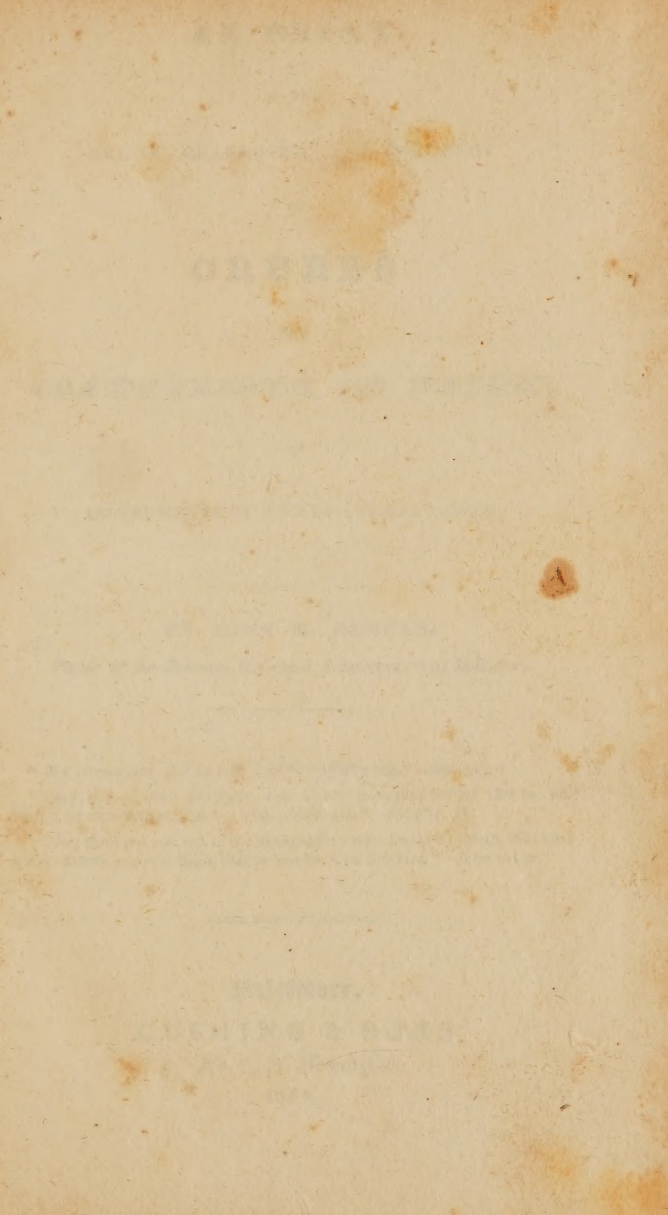
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AN ESSAY
ON THE
ORIGIN, CHARACTER, AND TENDENCY
OF
CREEDS
AND
CONFESSIONS OF FAITH,
AS

INSTRUMENTS OF ECCLESIASTICAL POWER.

BY JOHN M. DUNCAN,

Pastor of the Associate Reformed Congregation of Baltimore.

"We have a law, and BY OUR LAW he ought to DIE."—John xix. 7.

"They had AGREED ALREADY, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be PUT OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE."—John ix. 22.

"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he DOETH GOD SERVICE."—John xvi. 2.

Baltimore,
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P R E F A C E.

A FEW years since I offered, to students of theology, and to young ministers of the gospel in America, a small volume, entitled — “Remarks on the rise, use, and unlawfulness of creeds and confessions of faith in the Church of God.” That volume I have been desired to revise for republication, but have preferred to write the whole argument anew. The quotations and facts, which were then advanced, are generally preserved in the present essay; but with that exception, this volume, — offered in like manner to students of theology, and to young ministers of the gospel, while it is also extended to the public at large, — is a new work.

Dr. Miller’s name, with various quotations from his writings, appear in the following pages. I could not avoid such a reference. He was pleased to enter into the discussion, at the time when I felt myself called upon to express and publish my views, on the general topic which the controversy involves. So far as I know, his “Introductory Lecture” contains as fair and full an exhibition of the argument in favour of creeds, as can well be made out, and offers premises, which, if they be accurate, would irresistibly

sustain the creed-system. It would be a very difficult thing to assail these premises, in the circumstances under which I write, and not to refer in the most distinct terms to the venerable professor, and his Introductory Lecture, as well as to his "Letter to a gentleman of Baltimore," which he wrote in reply to my "Remarks," and in which he repeated the argument of the Lecture. This explanation I thought to be necessary, not as an apology for any notice I may take of his writings, but merely for the information of my reader.

If any observations in this essay shall be thought severe, I have to say in their justification, that, while with the system under review I can enter into no compromise, personal invective is very far from my intention. Neither is it my wish to be considered as hostile to any particular sect — much less to the presbyterian churches, with whom all my early associations were formed. This essay is concerned with general principles of policy, which belong to all denominations; and which no chain of reasonings, however subtle they may be, nor any series of facts, however extended, can possibly warrant. With ministers and Christians of all sects, who love their Master and keep his commandments, I would be ever ready, as "God in his providence offereth opportunity," to commune on the broad principles of the gospel; but for sectarian peculiarities, of any form or size, no one, who rejects the creed-system, can have any respect.

Since the "Remarks" were published, events have been every where transpiring, which have abundantly verified their predictions. • The whole world is startled by the fearful combination of difficulties that are gathering round our moral associations; and is astonished, not only at the impotency of political and ecclesiastical chieftains in their attempt to manage and guide the public mind, but at their pertinacity in maintaining old institutions, which, before their own eyes, are crumbling to the dust. Such is the exhibition now presented to every liberally-minded man. And it would seem, like as in former cases, that a terrible infatuation, which sacrifices even the common charities of life, and which recklessly libels motives when it cannot answer arguments, will provoke the Spirit of judgment.

These impressions I cherished when the "Remarks" were published, and they form the reason of the present Essay. My reader will please take this declaration, as an answer to all suspicions of personal invective, and consider himself as called to the review of a subject, which refers for the materials of argument to the circumstances in which it is found. Any severity, which he may be inclined to censure, it will then be seen, could not be avoided, without abandoning the argument, or destroying its force by making it insipid and frigid. Ecclesiastical measures being as they are, and human liberty being so important, it were a heartless task to write without being plain, or

to criticise without adducing facts. Such severity the Son of God himself employed, while yet his soul was tortured with anguish, and his love bore him to the cross. And if at any time I have declined from the high example, or have said any thing in an improper manner, or with improper feelings, I refuse not to be rebuked. The reader, however, must award to me enough of the spirit of my subject, not to demand a surrender of personal judgment, without personal conviction,

Baltimore, Jan. 7, 1834.

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ESSAY.

CHAPTER I.

A Creed — A sense in which the term is not used in this Essay.

THE subject, which it is the intention of this Essay to develop, is strictly *political* in its character. It involves the great question of human LIBERTY:—liberty to think, to speak, to write, and to act. Are we free to use the minds which God has given to us? to utter the thoughts which we may have conceived? to enjoy whatever we may possess? or must we be the servants of “many masters,” and yield our rights to the combinations of our fellow-men?

The controvertist, afraid of the popularity to which such a view is entitled, or of the all-absorbing interest which human beings might take in such a discussion, may probably be startled at the position I take. In his judgment the whole subject is far more sacred. It is not political, he will say, but, occupying higher and holier relations, it is, he will complacently tell us, ecclesiastical. And pray what is *ecclesiastical*? Is the human mind to be put off with a high-sounding technical term? If the church, as

such, be a divine institution, is not civil government established by a divine ordinance? Have not the Apostles exhorted us to “stand fast in the *liberty* wherewith Christ has made us *free*?” Have they not bidden us to be on our guard, lest we should be “again entangled with *the yoke of bondage*?” and warned us against the *lordship* which ambitious ecclesiastics would aspire to exercise?

With such scriptural precedents before us, and particularly when they are sustained by the whole history of the Jewish commonwealth, we may safely, and without rebuke, use the strongest terms, and appropriate the most vivid ideas, belonging to political science. And assuredly the criticism, which I have supposed to be made, will come with an ill grace from those, who ought best to know, how often and how long, and under what desolating circumstances, church and state have been united; who ought to be fully aware how very sensitive the public mind in this country is, in relation to that matter; and who ought to be apprised of the fearful prognostics which are now foreboding the most serious ecclesiastical troubles in the old world. Mankind, at this present hour, are deeply agitated on this subject; and that because circumstances are forcing them to discuss the great question of LIBERTY.

It is said that Napoleon, who has been so celebrated for intellectual power and magnificent project, and who lost ALL in the mighty and bloody game he played, because he descended to imitate the dynasties he had sought to crush, regretted very much that he

could not unite the temporal and spiritual power in his own person. "It is only in Christianity," he remarked, "that the pontificate is thus separated from the civil government. In the Roman republic the senators were the interpreters of the will of Heaven; and this power gave stability to the government. In Turkey, and in all the east, the koran is both civil law, and religious law." It is moreover said, that he "would have established a new order of jesuits. He would have had a body of unmarried men, devoted to his will, in order to direct, through them, the religious, moral, and political opinions of youth." There is not then so great a dissimilarity in these matters, that an identity of principle should be disowned, and all analogy discarded. Ecclesiastical men, it would seem, when on the side or under the control of the political chieftain, are his best and surest guides to despotism; and when opposed to his plans, or the advocates of human liberty, even a Napoleon would be foiled and defeated.

Why should the creed system not be viewed in its political bearings? or as a political matter?* The church is a community, and the nation is a community. The civil officer is a ruler in a community, and the spiritual officer is a ruler in a community. And if the church be constituted by an ELECTION on the part of Jehovah, and if the election be an *official* matter, as I take it to be,† then the church and the nation are coextensive. Of course, though we must

* I use the term **POLITICAL** in a general sense.

† See my lectures on the first three chapters of Genesis.

consider them to be altogether distinct, and the civil and ecclesiastical officer to be, each in his own place, accountable to the great governor of the world, yet the social attributes of the two are alike, and the term *political*, in its general acceptation, is correctly used in the present discussion.

The reason why I use the term, and so strenuously defend its use, is simply this: — It is desirable that the precise import of the technical words, CREED — CONFESSION OF FAITH, and the exact place which the ecclesiastical instruments, so denominated, occupy, should be distinctly ascertained. When we condemn these documents, and the use that is made of them, their advocates promptly and pertinaciously enough reply — “ You have a CREED yourselves, and thus are inconsistently holding fast to the very thing you professedly reject. Thereby you show that it is utterly impossible to get along without creeds; of which your own experiment affords ample proof.” I wish therefore to have it understood, that the argument here pursued is not in collision with the nature of christianity, and the philosophy of the human mind: and that the thing condemned is a creed as an instrument of ecclesiastical RULE, or as a political expedient by which ecclesiastics obtain a dominion over the human mind. Those who are engaged in the present controversy, and who have been so severely censured on account of the official obliquities imputed to them, are offended by, and cannot be reconciled with, the *policy* of ecclesiastics; but PROTEST against councils and decrees as the reformers did, and view the systems of doctrine and govern-

ment imposed on human consciences, as oppressive and as unwarranted as any papal measures which roused Luther and his compeers. The reader is now apprised of the nature of the following discussion, and consequently prepared for the details I am about to give.

To proceed then. The term **CREED** signifies *belief*. **CONFESSION** signifies an acknowledgment or avowal of some particular thing—as an opinion or a doctrine. In this simple view of the term every man must have a *creed*, who has any desire to know the truth, or who has made truth the subject of his study. His creed is made up of what he *believes*—his confession includes whatever he has avowed as his belief.

The latter term was applied to the ecclesiastical symbols under review after the reformation. The reformers were accused of holding doctrines repugnant to the peace and well being of society, for which they were arraigned at the bar of civil courts, as well as that of public opinion. Certain things imputed to them they disclaimed, and certain other things they *confessed*. The doctrines which they avowed, or the instruments of writing in which those doctrines were stated and avowed, were called their **CONFESSIONS**:—the confessions of their faith, or of what they believed. They intended thereby to show that they were not traitors to the commonwealth under which they lived, and that they held no doctrines which were inimical to the well-being of society. These instruments have been perverted by their followers, and have been employed, like the early **CREEDS**, against which the reformers themselves protested, as tests of

orthodoxy. In view of all such documents, of whose unscriptural character and immoral tendency those celebrated men seem to have been fully apprised, they proclaimed the great protestant maxim — **THE BIBLE IS THE ONLY RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.** The different sects have professedly held fast to the maxim; but having found, as they suppose, that the church cannot live without **ANOTHER RULE**, they have stated the bible to be the only **INFALLIBLE** rule, and then have brought in others, which, though admitted to be fallible, they are pleased to denominate **STANDARDS.** I shall then view these technical terms—**CREED** and **CONFESSION OF FAITH** as synonymous:—in general, for the sake of its brevity, employing the first, but taking either as may be most convenient.

A **CREED**, using the term in its literal sense, every man must have. It may be longer or shorter, broader or narrower, according to the number or the nature of the things he may *believe*, or according to the apprehension he may have of those things. Both reason and the scriptures require that he should have such a creed, and make confession of it too. **FAITH** is the distinguishing attribute of mankind, in their present lapsed state. They cannot **SEE** God and live. **VISION** has been lost, and **FAITH** is the natural substitute.* “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” It is “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” But then every believer should be careful that his faith, or his creed, should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the

* See my lectures on the first three chapters of Genesis.

power of God. He must have a—"Thus saith the Lord," or in modern phrase, "the testimony of God," speaking in his word or his works, whereon to rely.

To explain. Jehovah has revealed certain truths in the bible, which he calls upon men to *believe*, and which they are explicitly required personally to examine and apprehend, to the whole extent of their "several ability," in order that they may believe them. Every man who has obeyed the divine commandment, and who has received the things revealed as true, has formed a *creed*—in other words, he *believes* what the Holy Spirit has revealed. Without this he cannot be a christian; but plunges, as an obstinate rebel, into everlasting perdition. The sentence of the great Prince of life, in such a case, is—"He that believeth not shall be damned."—"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." To save men from an issue so awful, and to bring home to their hearts the truths, which, in the scriptures, are addressed with so much plainness and point to the human mind, the Comforter is sent. "He shall reprove the world of sin," said the great prophet, "because they *believe not* in me." Most indubitably, then, every Christian has a *CREED*, or he *confesses* certain things which he has learned and believes.

In making the above declaration have I conceded the point in controversy? Has one single assertion been made, which is, in any form, or to any extent, inconsistent with individual liberty? or which encroaches, in the least degree, upon the personal responsibili-

ties of a human being? or which admits, in any way, that there is another lord of conscience besides Jehovah himself? The advocates of the ecclesiastical documents which this argument condemns charge upon it this inconsistency. This charge is heard every where in conversation, and has been most positively averred, and pertinaciously urged by Dr. Miller, under whose professional notice my "remarks" have fallen. Let the reader judge for himself.

Again. As the word of God is intended for the human family, and as they may all have the Holy Spirit for their common teacher, there will be found much coincidence of sentiment among them. The first principles of Christianity will be readily perceived, and promptly admitted by all, as first principles are generally received in other departments of life. The secondary agencies which society itself affords, the institutions which the Lord of society has seen proper to establish,—parental example and tuition, ministerial instructions, the interchange of sentiment, and the ever varying circumstances which belong to living intercourse,—these and such like things, which are independent of human statutes, and whose influence is never greater nor more salutary than when human legislators let them alone, necessarily produce a similarity of views and habits. Society has such an inherent power to regulate itself. The *spirit* of the community, so to speak, moulds all the members of that community into a common likeness. Enlightened *public opinion*, if such phraseology should be more agreeable, will eventually conform every thing to it.

self; will overturn whatever opposes it, and will establish its own liberal and enlarged principles.

The coincidence of views and feelings, which has just been stated, may be admitted to exhibit something like a *social creed*. Or—the bible being a plain book—there are certain elemental truths, which men will embrace in common, from the very nature of the case. These are truths which no *test* of orthodoxy can make more plain; which may be brought into dispute by the manner in which those tests may express them; and which the different sects may embrace, notwithstanding their tests may be exceedingly varied. Such a social creed was found in the primitive church, when, as Irenæus reports, Christians throughout the world believed the cardinal points of evangelic doctrine, as though they inhabited a single house; when, as Dupin says,—“It was not necessary to assemble councils in order to own the truth and condemn error;” and when, as we shall hereafter see, there were no *ecclesiastical creeds*.

In this living intercourse of society, to which reference has been made, each man, under some form,—nay under a variety of forms,—*confesses* what he believes. He does this when he speaks, when, as a minister, he preaches, or when he appears as an author. “I believed,” said the psalmist, “therefore have I spoken.” Paul adopts the same rule, and describes the minister of Christ as uniformly acting upon it—“We also believe, and therefore speak.” No honest man ever acted in any other way. In like manner any one, who feels himself called upon so to do,

and who can gain public attention and confidence, may appeal to his fellow-men through the press. Provided he publishes that, which, after careful examination, he believes to be true, no one can deny his right to proclaim his creed from the rising to the setting sun. "As good almost kill a man," said Milton, "as kill a good book. Who kills a man, kills a reasonable creature, God's image ; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth ; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit ; embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." Many such theological and literary efforts are made now-a-days. The manner in which such efforts are made, and the matter which is thus presented to the human mind, are things to be settled between the author and the public, or between both and Jehovah, to whom they are all accountable. The abstract right involved in this intellectual intercourse no one will question. The freedom of the press no one will undertake to curtail ; and its licentiousness must be controlled and repressed by enlightened public opinion.

There is no doubt a most potent influence exerted by the agencies which have been enumerated. The *spirit* of the community is felt, acknowledged, and obeyed by all. In the broken fragments of society, or in the political and ecclesiastical parties which divide and distract the public mind, each one recognizes what is called the *esprit du corps* of his sect. Every denomination seems to have its own vocabulary, its own

ceremonies, its own officers, and its own interests. The ministry of reconciliation, as such, have done more for the world than any other class of men, and have exerted a more extensive and efficient control. The press has been the agent of revolution in both church and state, and is even now teeming with the complaints which mankind are uttering against ecclesiastical and political oppression. That a mighty influence is thus gone abroad, pervading and controlling every thing, is not to be denied. And under it all, every man should remember his personal responsibility, take heed to himself that he be not deceived, and exert his utmost ability to know the truth. "I gave my heart," said Solomon, "to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: THIS SORE TRAVAIL HATH GOD GIVEN TO THE SONS OF MEN TO BE EXERCISED THEREWITH." No unanimous consent of the fathers, no plea of pontifical infallibility, no benevolent and vicarious efforts of official men in making systems, or framing creeds, or writing learned commentaries, can save mankind from this intellectual toil. Nay, even here, where every thing should be sincere and true, because every thing is sacred and momentous, **ALL** are required to be cautious — "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." They must not be blindly led by "the spirit of the world," by the press, by politicians, or by the clergy; but take good heed to themselves, that they cherish a good conscience, and be prepared to answer at the judgment seat.

In conceding these things, I may again be charged with reasoning inconsistently. For now we have, not only a creed, but a man, and an official man too, proceeding to his place and duties in society, with his creed to direct him. The case, as stated, is, that every honest man, after having carefully inquired what is truth, and satisfied his own conscience on this question, goes forth to meet all the calls of his social position, and to fulfil his duties, according to his own convictions. And verily, if the advocates of creeds and confessions of faith, as ecclesiastical documents, can identify this case with their own, it is all folly to object to their doctrine. But no one, acquainted with the general subject, would have suspected them of so much puerility, if they had not inferred from the argument here delineated, that none should, agreeably to its principle, have any right to *preach*, and that a commentary or paraphrase is thereby altogether prohibited. What is there belonging to the ministerial office, or to a professed explanation of the scriptural text carried through the press, which is inimical to human liberty? These things may be, and doubtless have been, so abused. The master himself endeavored to protect his people from that very abuse, when he said — “Be not ye called rabbi; for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you, shall be your servant.” Notwithstanding these solemn charges, he yet commissioned his disciples to

go and preach the gospel to every creature. Was he inconsistent? Did it follow that the ministerial office was worth nothing; and that its exercise must be entirely prohibited, unless its incumbents for the time-being shall be permitted to prescribe rules of faith and practice? and human beings shall be despoiled of their individual liberty? Or may not these servants write an epistle, or a book, because their Master solemnly charged them not to aspire after a lordship over his people? What did they actually do? They both preached and wrote. They spoke the thing which they believed, nor would they undertake to address the community on any other principle. And yet they themselves imitated their master, in exhorting the community to succumb to no lordship, by whatever plea it might be sustained, or whoever might pretend to it, which interfered with their allegiance to Jesus Christ as **HEAD** over all things.

It is curious to observe, how easily a slight acquaintance with the annals of controversy enables one to turn the tables in an argument like the present. Dr. Miller, for example, is exceedingly positive, in his letters on the claims of episcopacy, in asserting that the bible *alone* is sufficient for all ecclesiastical purposes. At one time he observed—"I shall not now stay to ascertain what degree of respect is due to the writings of the fathers in general. It is my *duty*, however, to state, that we do not refer to them, *in any wise, as a rule either of faith or practice*. We acknowledge *the scriptures alone* to be such a rule. By this rule the fathers themselves are to be *tried*; and

of course they cannot be considered *as the Christian's authority for any thing*. It is agreed, on all hands, that they are not infallible guides: and it is perfectly well known to all who are acquainted with their writings, that many of them are inconsistent, both with themselves and with one another. We protest, therefore, utterly against any appeal to them on this subject. Though they, or an angel from heaven, should bring us any doctrine, as essential to the order and well-being of the church, which is not to be found in the word of God, we are bound by the command of our Master to reject them.”* And again: “As the Christian ministry is an office deriving its existence and its authority *solely* from Jesus Christ, the king and head of his church, it is obvious that his word is the *only* rule by which *any* claims to this office can *properly be tried*; and the duties and powers of those who bear it, ascertained.”† With all this I cordially agree. But Dr. Miller was not writing on the authority of CREEDS when he penned these sentences; nor did he ever suspect that they would one day be quoted on that subject. Afterwards, when called to sustain the creed system, and in his letter to “a gentleman of Baltimore,” he says — “I say, how is she (the church) to ascertain that this is the character of her *candidates for the holy ministry*, when, according to the brother whom I am constrained to oppose, she is forbidden to employ *any other test* than that which the most corrupt and unqualified will bear, (the bible) just as well as the most excellent; and which is, of

* Vol. 1, page 124-5

† Vol. 1, page 25.

course, in reference to the point to be decided, NO TEST AT ALL." When opposing episcopalians, the bible is every thing; when arguing with an opponent of ecclesiastical creeds, the bible is nothing. In the one case claims may be *tried* by the word of God as the **ONLY** rule, and in the other it is **NO TEST AT ALL.**—So much for consistency. More hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

CREED—*The sense in which the term is used in this Essay.*

Having given the above explanations, I may now proceed to inquire after the ecclesiastical sense in which the term **CREED** is used? It is in this connexion, that the objections, which are offered to the consideration of the reader, arise. Dr. Miller answers the inquiry,—what is a **CREED**? in the following manner.—“By a **CREED, OR CONFESSION OF FAITH**, I mean an exhibition, in human language, of those great doctrines which are believed by the framers of it to be taught in the holy scriptures; and which are drawn out in regular order, for the purpose of ascertaining, how far those who wish to unite in church fellowship are really agreed in the fundamental principles of Christianity.” Let us take this definition as it is; for the professor is intentionally precise, and would be offended if its order should be disturbed. I remark, in relation to it,

1. That by its own terms, a **CREED** is not a scriptural document. Certain individuals, styled “the fram-

ers of it," have drawn it up for a particular purpose. They wish to "unite in church fellowship," and having drawn out their instrument of communion, they make that instrument the **RULE** of their fellowship in the ordinances which Jehovah has established. Have they any right to do so? Who gave them such a right? Has not the Lord Jesus given a **RULE** of "church fellowship?" If he has not, by what authority do these framers of a creed undertake to enact one? If he has, by what authority do they frame another? Has a servant of the Son of God, who came to proclaim the **ONLY** gospel by which sinners can be saved, no reason to demand an answer? And if these framers of an uninspired rule of "church fellowship," who have narrowed the sphere of that fellowship, cannot show their warrant, will they persist in their perverseness? or expect that the Master's providence will sanction such proceedings?

Suppose that a certain number of the citizens of the United States should do, in view of the general constitution of the country, what these "citizens of the commonwealth of Israel" have done, in view of the charter of that spiritual kingdom. What would politicians say to such individuals? Suppose them to have broken up the American community into so many sects and parties, none of which are contemplated by the constitution—I say contemplated by the constitution; for if the bible, as the charter of the church, provides for the divisions recognised in Dr. M's definition of a creed, I have no objection to make—and each party, without any reference to local circumstances or territorial lines, to

be composed of those who have agreed together, in relation to the fundamental principles of the republic: or suppose the two great political parties, which so long agitated the country, and whose distinctions have passed away under the action of living intercourse, to have framed political creeds and catechisms, and transmitted them from generation to generation:—let all this be done, for the avowed purpose of maintaining the good order of the community, and the peace and prosperity of the nation: what would be the estimate which politicians would form of such doings? Would not these things be supremely ridiculous? And yet is not this the very thing which ecclesiastical men have done in the church? which church Jehovah has constituted one kingdom under law to himself. And have they not done it without any authority from their Lord? nay directly in the face of his authority? And have not their divisions been the subject of universal taunt and reproach? At this very hour, is not the world astonished at their bickerings?

2. Dr. M. has described a CREED to be an exhibition of scriptural doctrines, *drawn out in regular order*. Then those doctrines are not so drawn out in the scriptures themselves. And why have the framers of the creed undertaken to do it? Did not Jehovah know how to make a bible? Has he given to his church a deficient instrument? Has he committed a mistake in his mode of giving instruction? Was he ignorant of the character of the human mind? Did he not foresee the future circumstances of the church, when her children should file off under differ-

ent leaders? and her ministers should become philosophers and politicians?

Again. Is Dr. M. sure that the scriptural subjects are not in their regular and proper order, as they now stand on the sacred page? The original constitution — the mediatorial institute — antediluvian infidelity — postdiluvian idolatry — the covenant with Noah — with Abraham — with the people of Israel — the testimony of the Spirit of prophecy — law — gospel — are they not arranged according to providential proceedings? and as they should be? Can any man mend the order in which all these things stand; sustained by their own historical facts, and illustrated by the combination of external circumstances which introduced them? True, there is no systematic arrangement of dense, abstract propositions, which metaphysical theologians are pleased to call **DOCTRINES**. But is Dr. M. sure that a compend of such abstract matters is a better manual for general use, and for the purpose of “church fellowship,” than a varied, glowing, and general exhibition of moral subjects; in which allegory, incident, and changing circumstances, abound? Is he sure that such a compend is better for the schools of metaphysicians? It is certain that the Master thought not so: and I am greatly mistaken, if an honest mind, quitting such abstractions, and undertaking to study scriptural subjects in their own order, and in their own language, would not very soon learn the superiority of the biblical arrangement.

Besides — there have been a great many framers of these “doctrines in regular order,” and they have not

all given, either the same "doctrines," or the same "order." Which is right? which is wrong? are any of them right? How much better have they made the matter, when, as they suppose, the confusion of the bible has disappeared? and its chaotic materials have all been properly classed? When parties arise in a denomination, and high church and low church distinctions appear, what is "regular order" then? what are the true "doctrines" then? What has the popular mind gained by a creed? what have metaphysicians themselves gained? Would it not have been better if these instruments had never been framed? if theologians had honestly declared biblical subjects in their own form? and if an appeal had been made to the Master? who had promised to give his Spirit to lead mankind into all truth, and had described his bible as a competent instrument of moral reformation. Look to the church, as she has been under the administration of creeds; or as she is now, when different parties are contending about the meaning of their own standards, and the order of their own doctrines. The whole system has proved itself to be an egregious and ruinous mistake; and has shown ecclesiastical rulers to be over-zealous politicians; instead of being moral statesmen, who knew how to read both society and the bible.

3. In this definition Dr. M. has not included those examples of a creed, taking that term in its literal sense, which, in my preliminary explanations, have been excepted from this discussion, and, in view of which he so earnestly labours to prove my argument

inconsistent. He makes no reference to a man's individual belief or creed — to his expressing that belief or creed in private conversation or in public preaching — to his writing, printing and publishing that belief or creed in a book — a treatise — an essay — a commentary. Taking the term CREED in its ecclesiastical sense, the Doctor describes it in view of its ecclesiastical purposes, or as a document intended to regulate “church fellowship ;” and as drawn out by a number of individuals, who, either of their own motion or by delegated authority, would frame an ecclesiastical compact, with which no one has any special concern but themselves. The CREED, of which he writes, of which I complain, and in relation to which this controversy has originated, is “an accredited, permanent, public document” — “a summary of christian doctrine” — “a formulary,” other than the scriptures — “A TEST” of orthodoxy. No individual, unless it be his holiness the Pope, can frame and bring into the church such an instrument. No commentary is so employed. Neither Calvin's institutes, Dwight's theology, nor any other work of like pretensions, has ever reached such an eminence. Should Dr. M. address a series of LETTERS to presbyterians, in which he should elaborately show his opinions, and vividly expose the inconsistencies of his brethren, could he thereby furnish to his denomination an instrument of “church fellowship ?” — a TEST of orthodoxy ? Or might not the whole sect disregard his efforts ? and remain in statu quo — orthodoxy and heterodoxy mingling in sad confusion, — the very thing

which their CREED, adopted by common consent, has failed to correct, notwithstanding its boasted pretensions.

The framing of this ecclesiastical creed is a *social* matter — is the result of COMBINATION. According to the principles of the creed system itself, the right to make this rule of “church fellowship” depends upon a previous right to separate from the church, and to erect a VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION, in which those who *agree* shall live and worship together. This previous right to separate — to withdraw, if you please — or to “secede,” if an old technical term would not be offensive, I deny. The whole doctrine of voluntary associations, on which Dr. M’s entire argument depends, is unscriptural. Jesus did not withdraw from the Jewish church — from the synagogue — from the temple. That church cast him out, assaulted his reputation, reviled his good name, misrepresented his doctrines, and crucified him on Calvary. His disciples did not withdraw from the Jewish church, though, like their Master, they did not AGREE with the Jews, either in “fundamental principles,” or in ritual observances. You find them mingling with the nation, attending on the synagogue, going up to the temple, working while it was “called to-day,” esteeming themselves “the light of the world,” calculating that “a little leaven would,” or might, “leaven the whole lump,” and waiting, until, as Jesus foretold, they should be PUT OUT of the synagogue. Even the pharisees and the sadducees, though they differed so essentially, did not dream of separating, or WITH-

DRAWING, and forming a voluntary association. Dr. M. loves to trace things back to the early ages, and to quote the fathers. What does he think of the facts I have stated? or of the later and strongly expressed judgment of Jerome? who referred these voluntary associations to satanic policy. — “Before there were,” says he, “by the instigation of the devil, parties in religion, and it was said among the people, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas (Peter), the churches were governed by the joint councils of presbyters.” Was Jerome right or wrong?

If these **VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS** be scriptural, their law may be found on the scriptural page. But if their law cannot be found in the scriptures, why then, ecclesiastical politicians having “changed the priesthood,” they must “of necessity change the law.” The bible, not having contemplated these associations, has furnished no provisionary statutes for their regulation. As “Christ is not divided,” there is but the one law of **LOVE**. As no leader of any party has been “crucified” for its members, the law of *love* could not originate in his claims. And as no other law, but that of **LOVE**, is competent to regulate intellectual beings, the law of **DIVISION** could not be sanctioned by the God of **LOVE**, or by the Governor of mankind. I apprehend Jerome was not far wrong in his explanations; or if his language be offensive, then let us use apostolic phrase. — “For whereas there is among you envying and strife, and divisions, are ye not **CARNAL**, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not car-

nal?" — Protestants know how to apply this argument to the papacy, which, as Peter was not crucified for its members, is confidently represented to be a **CARNAL** thing. The brethren, who advocate ecclesiastical creeds, should look more calmly at this matter; for if the preceding remarks be true, their whole project is unphilosophical and treasonable.

4. This exhibition of scriptural doctrines, in human language, and in regular order, being completed; and its framers, desirous of uniting in church fellowship, having ascertained how far they are **REALLY** agreed in the fundamental principles of christianity; what **USE** will be made of this instrument? Dr. M. certainly intends that it shall serve a practical purpose.— What does he mean shall be done with this **CREED**? Its "framers" and their adherents must *subscribe* it. **SUBSCRIPTION** is the technical term, and as such is used in this essay. For example. When the Westminster assembly had prepared that best compend of religious instruction,—if our presbyterian brethren are accurate in their statements—the shorter catechism, the Scots commissioners proposed that the answers should be *subscribed by all the members*. This was the next step in "regular order." But the proposition was rejected, after a considerable number had shown it to be *an unwarrantable imposition*. Conscientious men can not proceed very far in a path of error, without meeting some friendly monitor to arrest their attention, arouse their scruples, and call them back to duty. This matter of *subscription*, has always been exceedingly troublesome: yet it is

the very next thing to be done by creed-makers, after they have penned their regular detail of the fundamental principles of christianity.

Let Dr. M. speak. In his introductory lecture he remarks — “These formularies, — if they be really an epitome of the word of God — and surely we think them so — every minister is BOUND to circulate with *unwearied assiduity* among the people of his charge.” It would seem that many of his brethren are of different opinions, and have cherished different feelings, unless they have been lately roused to do, what he declares they were formerly not in the habit of doing. “Why is it,” says he, “that so many ministers of the presbyterian church, with a confession of faith, and catechism, which I verily believe, and which the most of them readily acknowledge, are by far the best that were ever framed by uninspired men; and with a form of government and discipline, more consentaneous with apostolical practice, than that of any other church on earth, are yet so *negligent, not to say indifferent, as to the circulation of these formularies?* They, perhaps, do not take the trouble ever to inquire whether there be a copy of the volume that contains them, in every family, or even in every neighborhood, of their respective charges.” Even these supremely excellent standards, better than all others, cannot then command SUBSCRIPTION. All the world knows that this thing, though in perfect good keeping with the system to which it belongs, has, as it ought to have done, created trouble every where.

But let Dr. M. explain farther. He remarks, —

“That **SUBSCRIBING** a *church creed* is not a mere formality; but a very solemn transaction, which means much, and infers the most serious obligations. It is certainly a transaction which ought to be entered upon with much deep deliberation and humble prayer; and in which, if a man be found to be serious in any thing, he is bound to be honest to his God, honest to himself, and honest to the church which he joins. For myself, I know of no transaction, in which insincerity is more justly chargeable with the dreadful sin of **LYING TO THE HOLY GHOST**, than this.”*

Again — “It is truly humiliating and distressing to know, that in some churches it has gradually become necessary, to consider articles of faith as mere articles of peace; in other words, as articles, which he who **SUBSCRIBES** is not considered as professing to *believe*: but merely as engaging not to *oppose* — at least in any public or offensive manner. Whether we bring this principle to the test of reason, of scripture, of the original design of creeds, or of the ordinary import of language among honourable men; — it seems equally liable to the severest reprobation, as disreputable and criminal in a very high degree. Nor does it appear to be any alleviation, either of the disgrace or the sin, that many of the governors of the churches referred to, as well as those who **SUBSCRIBE**, publicly avow their adoption of this principle; admit the correctness of it; keep each other in countenance, and thus escape, as they imagine, the charge of hypocrisy.

* Dr. Miller's Lec. p. 69.

What would be thought of a similar principle, if generally adopted and avowed, with respect to the administration of oaths in civil courts? Suppose both jurors and witnesses, feeling it a grievance to be bound by their oaths to speak the truth, were to agree among themselves, and openly to give out, that they did not mean, when they swore, to take on themselves any such obligation; that they did not so understand the import of their oaths, and did not intend to recognise any such meaning? And suppose the judges were freely to admit them to their oaths with a similar understanding? Would a witness or a juror, in such a case, be exempt from the charge of PERJURY, or the judge from the guilt of SUBORNATION OF PERJURY? I presume not, in the estimation of any sober-minded man. If it were otherwise, then bad men, who form a majority of every community, might, by combining, violate all the principles of virtue and order, not only with impunity, but also WITHOUT SIN.”*

This is speaking out. I object not to Dr. M's logic. Give him his premises and his conclusion follows. If creeds be by divine warrant, or if church courts have a right thus to entangle the simple, control the credulous, fetter the timid, and overreach the young, assuredly those who have SUBSCRIBED, — if they have not committed the dreadful crime already, which Dr. M. seems to think multitudes have done, — are really called upon to consider where they stand. Those who have not SUBSCRIBED, are morally required, as honourable and honest men, to look, think, and ponder before they act. If an opponent of creeds had so plainly exposed the nature and consequences of SUB-

* Lec. pp. 69, 70.

SCRIPTION, our ecclesiastical politicians would have decried him as a traducer. But Dr. M. has declared these things, and they must needs be true. Presbyterian ministers, and those of other sects, should look to their situation, and listen to their conscientious brother, who has so courageously described the real character of subscription, and the official relations of ecclesiastical creeds. — For my own part, I feel constrained to ask Dr. M. for his divine warrant to involve the church in such difficulties, and her ministers in the danger of guilt so deep? And furthermore, whether he considers that the ministry and commentaries, whose services he supposes an argument against ecclesiastical creeds to disclaim and nullify, may charge such crimes against those who do not yield to them? — Perhaps he may now be able to see the difference between an ecclesiastical creed, and those which have been conceded as natural, necessary, and scriptural; and I may, therefore, consider myself as released from the necessity of again pointing it out.

It is worthy of observation that these ecclesiastical instruments are intended to be transmitted from generation to generation. Voluntary associations, like all other political communities, include parents and their children. It is natural that the project should have this hereditary action; and accordingly as long as the excitement, in which one of these voluntary associations originated, or to which one of these “accredited documents” is to be referred, can be kept up, the sect or denomination, to which it has given birth, lives. But when that excitement runs down, the body, which it had sustained, is paralysed, and death ensues. It is well for ecclesiastical rulers that such things can

be transmitted to posterity; for every age does not furnish men who are competent to frame an exhibition of scriptural doctrines, and put them into regular order. For example—who even dreams, that there are such men, as composed the Westminster assembly, now to be found in our ecclesiastical associations? The experiment is in progress, by which will be shown, whether they are able even to defend the creeds they have, either as to their political authority, or their theological elements. Peradventure it is a happy thing for the church that these men have passed away; for if they were here, they might undertake to form another document, better suited to the present times, and thus roll back the subject of human liberty for another generation. Peradventure they would be on the side of liberty. It is extremely problematical what they would do. Circumstances make men, and every cause must create its own agents. The Angel of the Lord addressed himself to a company of shepherds—the Messiah called a few fishermen to sustain his enterprise. These were “the worthy” men whom he found. The wise, the mighty, and the noble were all preoccupied with their own speculations and institutions.

But though these CREEDS descend from generation to generation, and though there seems to be a necessity that the master spirits of one age should control the habits and destinies of succeeding ages, yet it is singular that the PEOPLE, with a few exceptions, and in small sects, or at the commencement of a voluntary association, are not called to SUBSCRIBE these formularies. Subscription was resisted in the Westminster assembly as an unwarrantable imposition: a circum-

stance which, in that case, so far checked the whole thing, that "till forty years after, a subscription or assent to its confession of faith was not required of any LAYMAN, or MINISTER, as a term of christian communion." And now, though MINISTERS are required to subscribe, yet the PEOPLE escape the imposition, and in some places it is very difficult to obtain men, who will go into the ELDERSHIP on the principle of subscription. Latterly indeed there are some of the people, who talk very confidently about the value of creeds, and affect not to see how the harmony of a church can be preserved without them, though it may be they have scarcely read that particular one which gives law to their own denomination, or though, perhaps, as Dr. M. supposes, a copy of it is not likely to be found in the neighbourhood. This, however, is only an evanescent ebullition of party spirit — "*the esprit du corps*," of which there is less among presbyterians, Dr. M. says, "than in any other ecclesiastical body among us;" and who, judging from the letters he has addressed to them, are not likely very soon to recover it.

With the reason of this fact I am not particularly concerned, though there is no very great difficulty in ascertaining what it is. As a body increases in size, or multiplies in numbers, *subscription* becomes exceedingly cruel, or entirely impracticable, because very many human beings are introduced into the church, who never trouble themselves about metaphysical subtleties, or theological refinements. Or there is always a stronger feeling of liberty among the people, than among their rulers, and they may probably learn resistance, when they *feel* themselves oppressed.

“Men,” it is said, “never turn against creeds, until creeds turn against them.” Or, after all, ecclesiastical politicians are obliged to rely upon the moral influence of the ministry of reconciliation, as a divine institution. Be these things as they may, it is the *fact* which I wished to notice, because it shows the direction in which we must look for the deleterious action of these ecclesiastical instruments; and because it explains why so many of the people so little understand, or take so little interest in, or hastily condemn, the controversies of the present day.

As an example of the operation of creeds, look at the oath administered to the professors of a theological seminary. — “Every person elected to a professorship, in this seminary, shall, on being inaugurated, solemnly SUBSCRIBE the confession of faith, catechisms, and form of government of the presbyterian church, agreeably to the following formula, viz: In the presence of God and the directors of this seminary, I do solemnly, and *ex animo* adopt, receive, and subscribe the confession of faith, and catechisms of the presbyterian church in the United States of America, as the confession of my faith; or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief which is contained in holy scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation; and I do solemnly, *ex animo*, profess to receive the form of government of said church, as agreeable to the inspired oracles. And I do solemnly promise and engage, not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate any thing which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any thing taught in the said confession of faith or catechisms; nor to oppose any of

the fundamental principles of presbyterian church government, while I shall continue a professor in this seminary." Under such auspices are our young men introduced into the ministry of the Son of God!

The first thing which occurs to me, upon transcribing this official oath, is the question — **WHETHER** any thing like it is to be found in the sacred volume? Whether the Master so inaugurated his disciples, when he invested them with their apostolic power? or whether it is not plainly averred, that the guaranty of their fidelity was the fact, that the Spirit of God rested upon them? How must men "full of faith and power" feel? what must they say, when such an oath should be tendered unto them? I ask not what literary speculators, or mere theological dogmatists, would say? or how they would feel? But men who had learned truth in communion with their master, by studying the scriptures in their own connexions, or on the field of ministerial toil and prayer; — men who had lived above suspicion, who had never acted from a dishonourable motive, or who had established a character that should be entitled to the praise of all the churches — men who had been accustomed to instruct the ignorant, to comfort the distressed, to sustain the feeble minded, and to lead immortal spirits to the throne of grace — I ask how they must feel, and what they must say, under such circumstances? Methinks they should frown such things from their presence, and indignantly exclaim, — The denomination that must live by such means, let it die.

It next occurs to me to ask, **WHY** is it, that no such official oath, nor any thing that even approaches a resemblance of it, can be found upon the scriptural page?

Is it because, that a **THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**, like voluntary associations, has never been contemplated by the Master in constituting his church? because that these institutions are altogether **HUMAN**? and because that the Master prescribed a different course, which he required to be adopted when the church needed ministerial agents? Has the whole subject been left open to human legislation? or, has the Prince of life, **ELECTING** a community for himself, all of whom are his "kings and priests," made no law for the internal regulations of that community? Could he have entirely overlooked, or altogether omitted to provide for, the official instruments of his own church? Have we never heard of the divine right of **EPISCOPACY**? of the divine right of **PRESBYTERY**? of the divine right of **KINGS**? And am I too puritanical for ecclesiastical bigotry itself when I call for the divine right of **THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES**?

It is no doubt well known that there are those who boldly declare, that Jehovah has established no form of ecclesiastical government; from which it is to be inferred, unless they talk at random, that they doubt the validity of the sectarian organization under which they live. And if Christ has given no **LAWS** to his church, verily we may make as many **CREEDS**, as a slavish public mind shall please to acknowledge; or if he has called for no officers, and prescribed no way by which they shall be provided, we may feel ourselves at liberty to provide them the best way we can, or discard them altogether. But even then it may be a query, whether a theological seminary is the best scheme for accomplishing the end in view? How far are men wise, in destroying the beautiful varieties of human

life — varieties which beget so many profitable collisions, and produce a saliency in living principle which may so promptly recover from disaster, or perfect its own experiments by the versatile agency it employs — and merging the whole in a heartless uniformity?

But what did the Redeemer mean? when directing the seventy, he said — “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: PRAY YE THEREFORE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST, THAT HE WOULD SEND FORTH LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST.” Did he mean any thing? Has the statute grown obsolete? Has he withdrawn his superintending care? Is providence unconcerned about the prosperity of the church? with which he has promised to be present to the end of the world? Or is it a fact that his people feel unable to TRUST him? and that the direct effect of the creed-system, — notwithstanding it has appropriated faith to itself, and denominates all those who are outside of its pale heretics and infidels, — has nullified the whole subject of FAITH?

Means — MEANS — it will be replied are to be used. What means? Voluntary associations, and theological seminaries? neither of which appears on the record, and both of which, it might be shown, are as much at war with the philosophy of human life, as they are with the constitution of the christian church. Has the Master prescribed no means? Is prayer no means? Seeking for “elders in every city” — committing the ministerial charge to “faithful” and “worthy” men — are these no means? — But, — not to compass too much at once — when the Redeemer addressed the seventy, did he not furnish them with an elemental principle on the subject before us? — a princi-

ple competent to afford ministerial agents, of proper character, of ample gifts, of sufficient number, and in due **SUCCESSION**? Does the church confide in the provisions which the divine wisdom prescribes? and which the divine providence stands pledged to sustain? She cannot, and that “because of unbelief.” — The reader may see, how completely this scheme of voluntary associations, whose “accredited and permanent documents” are professedly intended to state “the fundamental principles of christianity” in “regular order,” abandons those principles, and demoralizes the community by despoiling her of **FAITH** in her beloved and glorified **LORD**.

Once more it occurs to me to ask—**WHY**, admitting these sectarian institutions to be what they pretend to be—why bind up the professors under such awful forms of obligation? Cannot a voluntary association *trust* the very men she delights to honour? Are not “the righteous, and the wise and their works in the hand of God?”* and can she not trust the Lord to direct and bless her wise men? What meaneth this? When the Son of Man cometh to set up his kingdom in glory,—“shall he find **FAITH** upon the earth?” Perhaps it is, as the great prophet said to the Jews, concerning Moses,—“If ye believe not his writings, how CAN ye believe my words?” They who cannot trust God, cannot be expected to trust one another. And surely one of the strongest marks of a deteriorated community is the destruction of mutual confidence.

But in all this, is it not evident, that an ecclesiastical party, driven to the use of such an oath, has no

* Ecc. ix. 1.

confidence in her own STANDARDS. It is a just maxim, and none affect to use it more complacently than the orthodox, that "TRUTH is great and will prevail." Nevertheless the practical influence of TRUTH, as embodied in their own creed, they cannot trust, no, not even when their book is put into the hands of their best men. Even these, they are afraid will decline from its integrity, and wander off into some hateful heresy—perhaps into all the supposed heedlessness and profanity of unitarianism. Surely this said system of doctrines, notwithstanding they are placed "in regular order," must lack evidence somehow or other, and does not come home to the human mind "in demonstration of the Spirit and with power," or its advocates need not to be so fearful. Did the church ever do worse? is it possible that she should do worse without a CREED, than, judging from the fact before us, she is now doing with one? Was the "wide spreading degeneracy" of some of the early ages more palpable than the wretched state of social morals which such facts exhibit? Was there ever any thing which was more strongly marked, as a matter with which the Spirit of God had nothing to do? excepting to prevent all the mischief, which men in their madness may perpetrate.

Thus young men are educated for the ministry. Their teachers dare not whisper a doubt about the correctness of a system, or the accuracy of a doctrine, which they are sworn to defend. Liberty of thought is destroyed in the youthful mind, under the force of an example as imposing as it is pernicious. Any suspicion of independence on the part of a pupil is enough to cow him into submission, and a profes-

sor's journal is a kind of jesuitical register, such as Napoleon desired to have ; which the commissioner of any vacant congregation may read ; and which will afford ample materials for ecclesiastical electioneering when some pulpit is to be supplied with a faithful guard of orthodoxy. A dull uniformity in the common place topics of sectarian theology may be immediately detected, and every one may see that mind and liberty wither together. — Let the reader judge for himself what the effects of this system of ecclesiastical creed-making must be, especially when sustained by such mighty *adjuvants*, or nourished by such resources. As a member of Christ's Church, and as a minister of his gospel, I protest against such gigantic immoralities ; — immoralities, which, we are told, may, in some of their connexions, bring a man near, if not under, the guilt of LYING TO THE HOLY GHOST, and some who may stand in certain relations to him, under the charge of SUBORNATION OF PERJURY. How could ministers of Jesus Christ place such things near his holy altars ?

CHAPTER III.

Subject continued. Cases stated.

ONLY one fact in illustration of the general subject has been stated in the preceding chapter. I wish there were no more. But I must proceed, and inquire after the circumstances of ministerial ordination. I shall state a case, which will bring the subject home to every man's bosom ; and to decide accurately and promptly on which, will require no great legal

acumen or philosophic subtlety. I shall not colour it too highly, nor substitute the visions of life for its realities. The subject under consideration seeks no advantage from the use of hyperbole.

A young man, of acknowledged talent and unfeigned piety, covets employment in the ministry, after having endured all those anxieties which that subject, as a matter of consultation between his own soul and the great head of the church, creates. His early history forms a train of providential circumstances of the most happy character. Every facility had been afforded to qualify him for the work. His believing parents had lent him to the Lord. He lived nigh the sanctuary; and, like Samuel, as he grew up, he was employed in its service, as opportunities occurred, or his own strength and buoyant feelings admitted. He cannot be charged with "habitual indiscretion," nor suspected of "a defect in sobriety in mind." His gifts, as far as he has been permitted to exercise them, have procured for him the esteem and confidence of all who know him; and effects have followed, which look very much like the Master's blessing shed upon his efforts — now evidently bespeaking him for himself. His lot has been cast in one of these voluntary associations, where he was known from his infancy, under whose eye his education had been conducted, and to whose old men and young men he had become firmly attached. His fathers were labourers in the same vineyard before him, and when they went to their rest, they left Elijah's mantle to their young Eli-sha. Now a call from the church demands his active services, and in the fulness of vigour and joy he prepares himself to obey.

Such is the case. What church court would hesitate to license or ordain such a "candidate for the holy ministry?" In ordaining him a presbytery would not contravene the scriptural statute — "lay hands suddenly on no man," for he is a faithful man, and is "able to teach others also." The way to proceed is perfectly clear, for every thing is obtained which the scriptures call for. But a difficulty arises from another quarter, and about which the scriptures have said nothing. He imagines that the CREED of this voluntary association is a piece of mere human legislation, and he cannot consent to subscribe it as obligatory on his conscience. He can consistently acknowledge none but Jehovah to be the lord of his conscience. Ministers of the gospel he views as his brethren, whom he can dearly love; but refuses to know them as the directors of his faith. He judges of the peculiarities of his own social position, and labours, according to his ability, to produce *there* the greatest amount of spiritual effect; but he shrinks from a proposition, which constitutes his brethren at a distance, or his fathers, who have long since gone to the dead, and around whose sepulchres he has often walked, — his spirit saddened by his own melancholy recollections — the overseers of his thoughts and duties. He thinks he must see the word of life with his own eyes, hear it with his own ears, handle it with his own hands, and taste it with his own lips. He knows that he might keep all this a secret from the presbytery, within whose bounds his lot has been thrown, and never whisper to any one that his mind has wandered into an orbit so eccentric. But he is too ingenuous. He detests vows curtailed by mental reservation, ut-

tered with equivocal feelings, and hidden from unsuspecting presbyters, but seen by the heart-searching God. With a guileless heart and an open brow he confesses the whole, and respectfully, but firmly, claims his **RIGHT**:—a right which exists, wholly independent of the will of the church court at whose bar he stands, and the evidence of whose existence must be sought for in his own spiritual character and ministerial qualifications.

What answer would the presbytery be apt to give him. “They would certainly reply,” says Dr. M. — “Your demand is very unreasonable. Our union is a **VOLUNTARY** one, for our mutual spiritual benefit. We have not solicited you to join us; and you cannot possibly have a right to *force* yourself into our body.”

“But, brethren,” meekly rejoins this troubled Apolos, “I am not forcing myself into your body. The bounds of my habitation have been fixed by the great arbiter of the universe. My lot has been cast among you without any reference to my consent. My father was your companion in ministerial labour. He taught me to love and revere you. Circumstances which I cannot control, and from whose influence I have no wish to escape, have led me to ‘desire the office of a bishop as a good work,’ to which, I am instructed in the scriptures, I must be ordained by ‘the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.’ No option is left to me, but to make my present application, and I humbly conceive that I may claim your compliance as my **RIGHT**. You can charge me with no crime, nor accuse me of any obliquity, saving, that, in obedience to the Lord’s command, I refuse to call any man **MAS-TER** on earth.”

“Young man,” hastily answers Dr. M. as moderator on the occasion, — “The whole world is before you. Go where you please. We cannot agree to receive you, unless you are willing to walk with us on **OUR OWN PRINCIPLES**. Such an answer as I have given you, ‘would undoubtedly be deemed a proper one by **every REASONABLE person**.’ If you ‘complain that the society has persecuted and injured you,’ no one will think you ‘possessed of common sense.’”

The youthful applicant, finding that his feelings are made a matter of ecclesiastical sport, or of lordly altercation, and that himself has been scorned as a fool, retires abashed and confounded, saying within himself, — Can these men be the servants of the meek and lowly Jesus?

He seeks another denomination. All are alike — a series of voluntary associations, self-constituted lords of the “heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Petty sects have divided among them the inheritance of the saints. Cherishing the most ridiculous conceits, they have lifted up their banner against the moral empire of the Lord of hosts,—to which he has given one faith, one baptism, and one hope of a heavenly calling,—like the bramble anointed to reign over the trees of the wood. He may range through them all, until he meets the Racovian catechism itself, or some of its shreds, manufactured into an article of faith.

Alone in wonder lost he seems to stand,
A very stranger in his native land.

He throws himself upon the elemental principles of society, and appeals to the community at large, as he finds it composed of some who profess, and of some who do not profess christianity. The first must obey

their rulers, or share his fate. The second care nothing about the matter, and feel that they are at perfect liberty to amuse themselves with clerical bickerings, or perhaps to infer their license to live in sin. Thus the holy things of the Lord are abused, or lightly esteemed, or sneeringly rejected, by immortal spirits on their way to his bar. What a scene is before us!

In such a case, what has a church judicatory done? It may be replied — “ We have refused to receive an uncomfortable inmate into our voluntary association, even as a father in a family would turn an unpleasant guest out of doors.” But the question is, even admitting the justness of the simile, who is the **HEAD** of the family in the present case? — the presbytery, who has been making a **CREED**, and changing the form of the church into a **VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION**, or the Father of mercies? And can it be made to appear, that our heavenly Father has turned off this ingenuous youth as a senseless, irreclaimable, prodigal? No, no. The presbytery, under the influence and direction of their own social compact, afraid that they may be charged with subornation of perjury, have turned an amiable young servant of the Lord Jesus out of the **VISIBLE CHURCH OF GOD**, have desecrated a temple of the Holy Ghost, where a purified spirit ministers under his heavenly impulses, and have refused a right to which the victim of their cruelty was equally entitled with themselves. The cup of ecclesiastical life, which sparkled in his hands, they have wantonly dashed from his lips. They have denied him the crumbs that fall from his father’s table, and have sent him out into the wide world, that waste, howling wilderness, with-

out a christian companion, and as much alone as **Eli-jah** among the idolaters of Israel. And where is their **WARRANT**? Let them show the sign manual of the king of saints if they can.

And will the christian community bear all this? Are there no startlings of conscience? no meltings of heart? no bursting of feeling? among them whose characteristic is, or ought to be, **LOVE** to God, and **LOVE** to man? Has the world been forsaken by the genius of liberty? or, having broken down political oppression, will they turn away from moral freedom, as a thing of naught? Do men of thought and spirit not see the evil of this false, dreadfully false, ecclesiastical organization? or think they that the world may be governed by principle, and that in the church conscience is sheer nothing?

Can they not all perceive, that, if high-minded and honourable young men are thus to be shut out from the ministry, these ecclesiastical associations will have agents better suited to their "taste," and who will more readily bow to their authority? Liberty and virtue go together, and when these are excluded, the low, the stupid, and the formal are exalted to high places. Such has been the fact in political life. A republic is more careful in selecting its official agents, than a monarchy, when sustained by a monied aristocracy. Wealth is a powerful engine; and when it is wanting, men seem to be compelled to court wisdom and virtue. I say — politicians have often acted thus; and judging from the scriptures, the same thing may be done by ecclesiastics. It is recorded of Jeroboam, that, after he had erected an ecclesiastical **ASSOCIATION OF HIS OWN**, — into which none could enter who

would not agree to walk with him ON HIS OWN PRINCIPLES — and had set up two calves of GOLD—the one in Bethel, and the other in Dan — “he made an house of HIGH PLACES,” and made priests of “*the lowest of the people.*”^{*} It is also recorded, that, when the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, and the king of Assyria had brought other people to dwell in the land, these new inhabitants “FEARED THE LORD,” and forgetting their professed piety, “made unto themselves of *the lowest* of them priests of the high places.”[†] Is there not something exceedingly unbecoming in these things : as Solomon says — “Delight is not seemly for a fool ; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.” The Redeemer himself, notwithstanding the extremities to which the state of society had reduced him, in view of ELECTING and ORDAINING disciples, would take none but such as were “worthy.” On a certain occasion, he promptly met an appeal, made to his feelings, on this principle. — “A man,” out of whom many devils had been cast, “besought him that he might be with him : but Jesus sent him away, saying — Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee.”[‡] It is not every “hopefully pious” young man, nor yet every converted prodigal, who is fit for the ministry. He may teach his own family at his own fire-side, or he may tell his friends how kindly the Lord hath dealt with him ; but the pulpit the Master has reserved for others — such men as voluntary associations are not always, as we have seen, willing to receive. I very much fear that the church will repent, when it may be

* 1 Kings, xii. 25—33 ; xiii. 33.

† 2 Kings, xvii. 32.

‡ Luke, viii. 38, 39.

too late, the establishment of her scholarships, and her education societies. Unless I am greatly mistaken she is trying a most hazardous experiment, and doing one of those things, which blind and deceive by their apparent benevolence, and whose mischief is not suspected, until its magnitude throws it beyond a remedial operation — Such the pauper system has proved itself to be, in other connexions.

I have another question to ask: — What would a voluntary association do, if one of her own number, who had SUBSCRIBED HER CREED, should discover that the whole system is “an unwarranted imposition,” and frankly declare the fact? Could he remain? Must he be cast out — withdraw — or what? — The reader may, perhaps, recollect the doings of the synod of Philadelphia, in the city of Baltimore, a few years ago. Perhaps he does not. Then let them be forgotten; and especially as that body appears to have been passing through a retributive process ever since, — as well as the general assembly, which, though accustomed periodically to revise synodical transactions, took no notice of the strange proceedings, and so assumed, tacitly, a proportional share of responsibility. I have, at least, no desire to be the historian, or the avenger, of my own wrongs; whether inflicted with official presumption, or with the wily secrecy of injurious reports, which misrepresent, traduce, and call hard names. Let them pass; and let those, who believe every thing and examine nothing, call me a sabellian, a unitarian, a pelagian, or whatever suits them best. There are times, when even an apostle has done all that he can honourably do; or when he must close all argument by simply saying — “If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.”

To return to the question. The ecclesiastical "family" is now annoyed by the presence of "an uncomfortable inmate." His language is strange to them — his habits are eccentric — he acknowledges not his ecclesiastical parentage, averring that his Master in heaven has forbidden him to acknowledge it. It is not simply some of the scriptural doctrines, drawn out in regular order, that he questions. Then a **COMPROMISE** might be effected. New school and old school differ and argue. It is only a family quarrel, and such things may be made up. One party may rise, and another may go down; but that is only a change of dynasty. The **CREED** is alike dear to both parties, though they are not **REALLY** agreed as to the fundamental principles of christianity, which that creed exhibits. The individual in question has gone much farther. He may hold the fundamental principles of christianity which they profess; but he questions the principle of ecclesiastical power, denies the authority of its laws, and claims his privileges as a freeman of the Lord — *i. e.* he wishes to have the liberty to think, speak, and act for himself, under his responsibility to the great Head of the church. This is **TREASON**. No compromise can take place. All parties unite against him. He must **DIE**.

I am aware that there is some misgiving. Such a brother may be tenderly loved. His integrity is undoubted, his usefulness is apparent, his ministerial qualification has been tested, and the people may be in his favour. The case is not easily managed. Time has been, when it would have readily been despatched, but that time has passed away. There is considerable difficulty about it *now*. All the skill and

secrecy of a caucus are necessary to adjust preliminaries. The wisest men must be consulted; epistolary correspondence must be actively carried on; the public feeling must be ascertained; travelling committees must make very full inquiries,—and after all, it is desirable that the criminal should **WITHDRAW**.

But from what shall he withdraw? From the *church*? That may not be, for such an act would be apostasy, and would be followed by perdition. “If any man draw back,” saith the king of saints, “my soul will have no pleasure in him.” From a voluntary association? Such an institution is not known to the inspired writers: or if it be, it must be in the form of a Jewish synagogue, from which no disciple could detach himself, though its rulers might possibly turn him out. Neither principle, nor precedent, nor statute, has been given by the legislator to enjoin such an act. The accused may refuse to recognize the authority of a self-constituted tribunal, or to obey a mandate thence proceeding. He may determine to obey God rather than men; but still the union, which subsists between him and his brethren, he cannot dissolve. They may please to say that he shall not be numbered with them, nor shall he be associated with them in their ecclesiastical operations; but it is mere presumption. “‘The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.’” Ecclesiastics may think themselves competent to utter such foolish things; in which case, and when reduced to the last extremity, a maltreated brother may leave them to themselves and to their own responsibilities—to the judgment of God, of the church, and of their own consciences; but the

union, both morally and ecclesiastically speaking, is not, and cannot be dissolved.—Here, let it be remembered, that the power to excommunicate a reprobate is not denied, any more than the possibility or propriety of amputating a limb that is incurably diseased is denied by the apostle, when he compares the church to the human body. To this principle a church court must necessarily resort, and proceed to judicial excision, only when guilt is proved.

From what shall the individual, whose case we are considering, *withdraw*? From the official position which divine providence has given to him? and where he has been enabled most graciously and successfully to minister? Must he throw away the certificate of his own fidelity, which the Spirit of the Lord has written in the hearts of the people? and the bread which has been provided for him at the altar, in compensation for his labour, and according to the divine institution? Must he refuse to maintain what he knows to be true, and cowardly abandon his trust, when troubles rise? May he consider the people of the Lord as the mere property of priestly combinations? and leave them to a vassalage, to which he has too much spirit to submit himself? Does he believe that he has been learning the doctrine of christian liberty, in his ministrations to them? and does he not owe to them the declaration of truth acquired by his official intercourse among them? May they not listen to instructions, which their own circumstances compelled him to look at, and which, perhaps, he had never thought of had not their own situation suggested them? Like the professors of a theological seminary, may he not utter what he finds in the scriptures, lest

he should directly or impliedly infringe on the sectarian statute? And all — for what? To save the presbytery the trouble and the pain of investigating the bible, and trying his case. Turn his own accuser and judge, and condemn what he knows to be right? incur obloquy he does not deserve? and sign the sentence of his own transportation, when he stands justified at the bar of his own conscience? — Is this the doctrine of our ecclesiastical rulers? Would he not deserve to be tried and condemned for such an undignified course, and for such cowardly desertion?

Thus have theologians thought they might smother up the CREED QUESTION, and keep the public mind from looking at the mighty evil it involves. The term *withdraw*, or its idea, like the plea of *unity* in the Catholic church, seems to come in quite apropos, and to hit precisely the amount of interest which the public take in the general subject, and the sluggishness they betray in view of moral liberty. One would be almost convinced that as it is advanced with so much frequency and pertinacity, there must be both truth and sense in the argument, and finds it about as useless to reason against the childish idea, as it is to deny the boasted pretence of “Catholic unity.” Perhaps the public mind is changing, as ecclesiastics have been forced to meet the emergency, and its fearfulness they seem every day more and more to feel. Perhaps they moved hastily and injudiciously in the first instance; it may be they had better have let it alone in the beginning; but there is no retreating now. Taught that they are exposed to the charge of SUBORNATION OF PERJURY, they must go on and TRY such a case. The crisis has come, and when the accused

demands to know by what rule he is to be *tried* — the BIBLE or the CREED? — the operation of the creed system must necessarily be developed to public view.

Unfortunately for them, the creed itself proclaims the BIBLE to be the ONLY RULE of faith and practice; and that the Spirit of God, speaking in his WORD, is the ultimate judge in religious controversy. Will they then reply to the accused, you shall be tried by the BIBLE? They have never so done, in any case with which I am personally acquainted, though they have been most solemnly called upon to do it, and that again and again. They have quoted no scriptural statute; but abandoning the very principle, so broadly stated in their own confession, they have relied on their own petty rules; and have not very scrupulously adhered even to them, nor evinced a very profound acquaintance with them. Calvin says, that “the schools acknowledged the conscience of man to be superior to all human judgments”; but then he adds: “What they confessed in one word, they afterwards overturned in fact.” Just so these brethren act. The bible, they say, is the only rule of faith and practice — is the best of all books — is a plain volume, and easily to be understood. Hear them argue against papal assumptions; or on the floor of bible societies describe the majesty of truth, and tell the wonders which the scriptures will shortly accomplish in the world — and one would think there never had been such an instrument as an ecclesiastical creed, nor any need for such a useless, silly, thing; or that, at least, it must be referred to papal tyranny. Enter their church courts, and the scene is shifted. The bible has disappeared; the creed becomes the puissant instrument of ecclesi-

astical power ; and though they are always differing about its meaning, they give the accused to understand, that by **IT**, and not by the **BIBLE**, he is to be judged. They answer like the Jews to Pilate — “ **WE** have a law, and by **OUR LAW** he ought to **DIE**.” I might indeed refer the reader to the history of the scribes and pharisees, as the best exposition of the whole subject under consideration.

The framers of creeds would have us understand that these creeds and the bible are the same in doctrine. But the fact, which they have so confidently averred, themselves have rendered extremely problematical — by “the confused multitude” of creeds they have given us, and which are very different in form, phrase, and substance — by their own extreme sensitiveness, lest if the bible be brought in absolutely *alone*, their doctrines will be overthrown, and pelagianism, or unitarianism, or universalism, or infidelity, shall immediately come in like a flood — and by their own cautiousness in declaring certain doctrines, which they have yet clearly asserted in their own summaries. As an example of the last, take **PREDESTINATION**, which is generally referred to Calvin, but which is, in fact, to be traced back to Augustin, about whose real meaning jansenists and jesuits in the catholic church have been greatly divided. The episcopal church tells us, that though “the godly consideration of this doctrine is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons,” yet it may be very dangerous to curious and carnal persons. And in the presbyterian church, what minister comes forth, and unequivocally affirms with his own confession, that — “By the decree of God,

for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death?" Under such circumstances, can it be true, that the bible and the ecclesiastical creeds are *alike*?

But if they are alike — if the bible be the only rule of faith and practice — if the Spirit of God, speaking in the scripture, be the supreme judge in religious controversy — if the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, be universal and inalienable — if "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" — if ministers must be workmen, who need not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*, — if they, who speak not according to the law and the testimony, have no light in them — and if the accused brother, to whose side mercy of course should lean, apprehensive that justice will not be done to him if a sectarian creed be employed, prefer to be tried by the BIBLE, what honourable objection can be made?

I apprehend that, while the opponent of the creeds feels himself to be perfectly safe, if he shall be fairly met on scriptural ground, his judges must be equally aware of the fact. On the broad principles of truth and equity Pilate would not have condemned the Redeemer; but when he heard the Jews say — **WE HAVE A LAW** — he was alarmed. So these brethren find the bible to be entirely too latitudinarian — "a test, which," says Dr. M. "the most corrupt and unqualified will bear, just as well as the most excellent." The anti-creed brother would escape conviction. This they

know, and, in their dreadful infatuation, they mock his scruples. Have they forgotten what Calvin, the very man whom many of them admire so much, has said on the subject of human laws? — “If they tend to introduce any *scruple* into our minds, as though the observance of them was *essentially necessary*, we assert, that they are *unreasonable impositions on the conscience*. For our consciences have to do, not with men, *but with God alone*. And this is the meaning of the well known distinction, maintained in the schools, between a human tribunal and the court of conscience. When the whole world was enveloped in the thickest shades of ignorance, *this little spark of light still remained unextinguished*, so that they acknowledged the conscience of man to be superior to all human judgments. It is true that what they confessed in one word, they afterwards overturned in fact; yet it was the will of God, that even at that time there should remain some testimony in favour of christian liberty, to rescue the conscience from the tyranny of men.” It would appear, that the opponent of creeds has, not only the bible on his side, but the creeds themselves; and that his judges have entirely lost the spirit of the system they are seeking to uphold, and would extinguish that “little spark of light,” — the vestal fire on the christian altar — which it seems Jehovah carefully preserved and fanned in the schools themselves.

I apprehend, that, as the creed is professedly an exhibition of scriptural doctrines drawn out *in regular order*, our ecclesiastical inquisitors, who are so fond of “*hunting heresies*,” and condemning heretics, must be conscious of some exegetical imbecility. They

seem to admit, that, without the help of the creed, they could not present those doctrines in regular order. Nay, they charge the whole generation with like imbecility — for abandon the creed, and they say we will all become pelagians, or something worse. This appears to be the reason why commentaries are so popular, and appeals to the fathers so frequent; and why there is so much difficulty in understanding heretics, when these venture on biblical ground, and undertake to look at its various objects with their own eyes. I greatly fear that a dreadful secret is thus escaping to public view; and that, as has been often asserted, the fathers were giants, but we are all pygmies. Ignorance of biblical subjects, among those who ought to know how rightly to divide the word of truth, is the worst evil that can befall the church.

I wish I may be wrong in these apprehensions. But well do I remember the answer of one of the members of the synod of Philadelphia when it met in Baltimore, when asked, why that synod did not quote the scriptures in the trial then pending, instead of those “vain repetitions” which were so very abundant? he replied — “Because they could not.” That brother has gone to his rest, and never withdrew his confidence from the men, who were at that time so unrighteously condemned. — But I wish to keep clear of all personalities. — The reader surely cannot fail now to understand what an ecclesiastical creed is, and what is its demoralizing influence in the church.

I must, however, allude to another class of facts. These voluntary associations treat each other as heretics. The catholic church, as she proudly styles herself, so estimates protestants. They are of recent

origin, she avers, and fail to trace their **SUCCESSION**. Episcopacy in like manner assails presbyterians, and pronounces their ordination to be invalid. **SUCCESSION** here too is of mighty importance; notwithstanding the apostle Paul seems to think, that it was one of the most decisive marks of the unprofitableness of the Jewish economy, which consequently referred to the coming Saviour, as the **ONLY** competent **HEAD** of the church. By parity of reasoning, **SUCCESSION** must now show the incompetency of any ecclesiastical **HEAD**, save the Lord Jesus himself. The smaller sects find something else which the larger associations have left out of their exhibition of scriptural doctrines in regular order, and so bring in other organizations, of various sizes and peculiarities. The papal controvertist affects to smile at *protestant* divisions, and the sceptic, considering the maternal hierarchy to be but another sect, laughs at the *whole*. And thus we have popes, and bishops, and presbyters; while, besides all these, as the result of moral, rather than ecclesiastical divisions, we have Augustin, and Calvin, and Luther, and Henry VIIIth, and Wesley, and Edwards, all drawing off the affections of mankind from the glorified Jesus. The young man, who would not choose a master among them, but who prefers to honour and obey the King of saints, and that within the localities which have been allotted to him, the advocates of creeds would say, no one would think to be "possessed of common sense."

Such a silly reasoner was Milton, when he said — "Seeing, therefore, that no man, no synod, no session of men, though called the church, can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another man's con-

science, — which is well known to be a general maxim of the protestant religion, — it follows plainly, that he who holds in religion that belief, or those opinions which, to his conscience, and utmost understanding, appear with most evidence or probability in the scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censured for a heretic than his censurers; who do but the same thing themselves, while they censure him for so doing. For ask them, or any protestant, which hath most authority — the church or scripture? They will answer, doubtless, that the scripture: and what hath most authority, that, no doubt but they will confess, is to be followed. He then, who to his best apprehension follows the scripture, though against any point of doctrine by the whole church received, is not the heretic; but he who follows the church, against his conscience, and persuasion grounded on the scripture. To make this yet more undeniable, I shall only borrow a plain simile; the same which our own writers, when they would demonstrate plainest, that we rightly prefer the scripture before the church, use frequently against the papist in this manner. As the Samaritans believed Christ, first for the woman's word, but next and much rather for his own, so we the scripture: first on the church's word, but afterwards and much more for its own, as the word of God; yea, the church itself we believe then for the scripture. The inference of itself follows: if, by the protestant doctrine, we believe the scripture, not for the church's saying, but for its own as the word of God, then ought we to believe what in our conscience we apprehend the scripture to say, though the visible church, with all her doctors, gain-

say: and being taught to believe them only for the scripture, they who so do are not heretics, but the best protestants: and by their opinions, whatever they be, can hurt no protestant, whose rule is not to receive them but from the scripture; which to interpret convincingly to his own conscience, none is able but himself, guided by the Holy Spirit; and not so guided, none than he himself can be a worse deceiver. To protestants therefore, whose common rule and touchstone is the scripture, nothing can with more conscience, more equity, nothing more protestantly can be permitted, than a free and lawful debate at all times, by writing, by conference, or disputation of what opinion soever, disputable by holy scripture: concluding, that no man in religion is properly a heretic at this day, but he who maintains traditions or opinions not probable by scripture, who, for aught I know, is the papist only; he the only heretic, who counts all heretics but himself.”*

Thus it appears, that the great reason, why there are so many sects in the protestant church, is, not that private interpretation has been allowed, but that it has been restrained. Copying the colossal hierarchy, against whose arbitrary power the reformers protested, and perhaps under the impression that the world could not entirely dispense with a dominion to which it had been accustomed, new sects took the government into their own hands. Thus LOVE, the mighty principle of social life which Jehovah has established, gave way to the *esprit du corps*, of which Dr. M. speaks. Living intercourse, which makes

* Treatise on civil power in ecclesiastical causes.

whole nations and generations to resemble each other, was broken up. Gentleness, forbearance, kindness, mutual good offices were all absorbed in party-strife—an “accredited document” became the instrument of accredited collisions,—a “permanent document” the instrument of permanent contentions—social vices flourished where social virtues ought to have bloomed and ripened, rich and fragrant—and where a thousand like things, nuncupative and influential, have passed away. When empires have risen and fallen, when forms of government have been modified or suspended, and when the new world has started up, free and independent, majestic and glorious, these petty ecclesiastical sects still live, and their contentions and intolerance and ignorance live with them. If it had not been for these accredited and permanent tests of orthodoxy, long ago had the asperities of ecclesiastical life been rubbed off; and all the world should have known professing christians to be the servants of Jesus by the simple fact, that **THEY LOVED ONE ANOTHER**. Had politicians, when told that there is not virtue enough in the world to sustain a republic, and that the attempt would throw open the flood-gates of licentiousness, reasoned and acted as ecclesiastical men have done, we Americans, at this hour, might have been sitting at the footstool of majesty, instead of thanking God for the prosperity of the nation, and the moral character of the great experiment. Our theologians are ignorant of the philosophy of **LIBERTY**. Mistaking its characteristics, they have been so many false prophets of its issues. The gospel, they ought to have known, if permitted to take its course, would harmonize mankind, and would hush into com-

mon silence both ecclesiastical and moral dogmatizings. Presbyterianism, episcopacy, methodism, &c. would all disappear, along with calvinism, unitarianism, and such like heartless systems. They are all, with the papacy at their head, but insects sporting in a transient sunbeam. Let in the light, and all are gone.

“ Ariosto tells a pretty story of a fairy, who, by one mysterious law of her nature, was condemned to appear, at certain seasons, in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those who injured her during the period of her disguise, were forever excluded from participation in the blessings she bestowed. But to those who, in spite of her loathsome aspect, pitied and protected her, she afterwards revealed herself in the celestial and beautiful form which was natural to her; accompanied their steps, granted all their wishes, filled their houses with wealth, made them happy in love, and victorious in war. Such a spirit is **LIBERTY**. At times she takes the form of a hateful reptile. She grovels, she hisses, she stings. But wo to those who, in disgust, shall venture to crush her! And happy are they, who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in the time of her beauty and her glory!

“ There is only one cure for the evils which newly acquired freedom produces — and that cure is **FREE-DOM**. When a prisoner first leaves his cell, he cannot bear the light of day: — he is unable to discriminate colors, or recognize faces. But the remedy is, not to remand him into his dungeon, but to accustom him to the rays of the sun. The blaze of truth and

liberty dazzle and bewilder nations, which have become half blind in the house of bondage. But let them gaze on, and they shall soon be able to bear it. In a few years men learn to reason. The extreme violence of opinions subsides. Hostile theories correct each other. The scattered fragments of truth cease to conflict, and begin to coalesce. And at length a system of justice and order is educed out of the chaos."

The lovers of creeds are exceedingly afraid of LIBERTY in the church. They are assured that confusion and anarchy and licentiousness will ensue. An apostle exhorted the first believers, whom "the Son had made free," not to use their liberty as a cloak of maliciousness; but he did not despoil them of their liberty. Doubtless difficulties will arise, for there are always some evils immediately attendant on the commencement of every great experiment. They who have been accustomed to creeds, will not know what to do without them. Those who have read theology only in systems, and who can recognize scriptural doctrines only "in the regular order" of a confession of faith, will be perplexed in preparing lectures, or writing sermons. They will be compelled to study the bible, human nature, and their own hearts. They will be obliged to appeal to their Master for the teaching of his Spirit. But let them persevere. Their views will be enlarged, their thoughts elevated, their affections sanctified, and their controversies at an end. They will breathe a holier and more genial atmosphere. Those little communities, now detached from society and from one another, will die, and their enmities and jealousies will die with them. The minis-

try, instead of having separate interests, and being bound to society by feeble ties, will be parts of society, partaking of the general sympathies; and will be beloved and confided in by all. All apprehensions of a union between church and state will be at an end, and the entire community will be the *church*, according to God's "purpose of election,"—the light of the world and the salt of the earth. This is a "consummation devoutly to be wished for," but it can never be realized while "voluntary associations" live, and while creeds are the "accredited and permanent tests of orthodoxy." — CREEDS MUST DIE, or society will dissolve amid fearful judgments, which an atheistic policy will incur.

The reader, I hope, now understands me. He sees, he feels, that I am not at war with the philosophy of the human mind, but with party politics and despotic rule in the church. And if what has been said is true, how can he evade the argument, dismiss the subject from his thoughts, condemn the spirit with which it has been handled, or refuse to share in the anxieties which no honourable mind can disown. The effect must be left with himself as a responsible being. My concern was to make myself understood; and believing that object to be fully accomplished, I shall next inquire after the origin of these rules of "church fellowship."

CHAPTER IV.

ORIGIN OF CREEDS. — *Have they a Divine warrant?*

IN the preceding chapter nothing has been particularly observed concerning the scriptural character of the doctrines, professedly exhibited in an ecclesiastical creed. The mere documents themselves, as articles of a voluntary association, and as instruments of ecclesiastical power, have been brought into view. To have stated a second question would have only embarrassed the discussion, and would have taken away the mind of the reader from the simple principle, intended to be set forth; and which is equally applicable to those instruments, whether the doctrines stated be scriptural or not. I am neither unwilling, nor afraid, to meet the second question; but have done it, at large, in my lectures on the first three chapters of Genesis, which, any one, who may take any interest in my views in that direction, may consult at his leisure.

In passing, however, it may not be irrelevant to suppose, that possibly the doctrines in question may not be scriptural. If such should be the fact, what fearful consequences must ensue! Error would then be sustained and perpetuated, and whole generations would be bound up under a fearful ecclesiastical spell. The supposition is not an improbable one. These CREEDS are entirely *human*. Certain “framers,” who wish to “ascertain how far they are really agreed,” have drawn them out; and it belongs to man to ERR. The opinions of mankind are very different in different ages. Their philosophy, their language, their habits, and

their circumstances, are ever changing. The creeds themselves vary. The Westminster confession has been modified, with the view of adapting it to the institutions of this country. Different parties arise under the same creed, — as in the church of England; in the church of Scotland; and in the presbyterian church, of which Dr. M. is a distinguished and honoured member. The inventions of men filled the heathen world with idols, the Jewish church with traditions, the papal church with gross absurdities, and all the protestant churches with contentions. It is then a very natural suspicion that the subject matter of these CREEDS cannot be sustained as scriptural, or vindicated to the common sense of mankind. It would be hard to reason with a man, who, apprised of these facts, sits down submissive and unsuspecting. Effectually chilled, mind is to him of no use, and free-agency is a name. — But this by the way.

If these permanent and accredited documents be as needful and valuable as they are represented to be; and if, without them, the church cannot “bear witness to the truth,” nor live in harmony, nor escape the pollutions of error, then surely the scriptures themselves must have suggested the happy expedient. Otherwise Jehovah would have created a moral world, which his providence is not competent to sustain; and where even the simple philosophy of cause and effect would be most unaccountably overlooked. “The power of the keys” must have been lodged somewhere; or else ecclesiastical politicians, by claiming it unrighteously, have interfered with the liberty which Christ has granted to all. Have the scriptures furnished a warrant for these things? I follow Dr. M.; and should

this essay ever fall into his hands, it is to be hoped that he will recognize his own sentences. On a former occasion he was pleased to say that his arguments had not been assailed, nor even touched.

He observes that the "Church is a *society* ; a society which, however extended, is 'one body in Christ,' and all who compose it, 'members one of another.' Nor is this society merely required to be one in name, or to recognize a mere theoretical union; but also carefully to maintain 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' They are exhorted 'to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind.' They are commanded all to 'speak the same thing,' and to be 'of one accord, of one mind.' And this 'unity of spirit' is as essential to the comfort and edification of those who are joined together in church fellowship, as it is to a compliance with the command of their Master." Therefore — what? Why, as the bible is not a competent instrument of unity, the church may break up into voluntary associations ; and those who agree may walk together under laws of their own, and on their own principles. Is this Dr. M's logic? From a command to UNITE, he infers a right to DIVIDE.

But has he not said, that the church is — 'a society,' which, however extended, is 'one body in Christ?' Is only ONE of these voluntary associations the church? or do they ALL belong to the 'one body in Christ?' If only ONE is the church — then which ONE? The benevolence of the age, in forming a new series of voluntary associations, on broad principles, is all wrong. The articles of 'correspondence' between different churches are all wrong. The whole doctrine of UNION, in its popular sense, whose motto is "UNION IS

STRENGTH," is wrong. If ALL these sects are attached to the 'one body of Christ,' then the statutes which Dr. M. so gracefully and hastily quotes, are applicable to the whole ; and they solemnly require the different sects to quit their strife, and maintain 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' But Dr. M., instead of urging *unity*, calls upon christians to *DIVIDE* ; and instead of the *WHOLE* being of 'one accord, of one mind,' and learning to 'speak the same thing,' he sustains the system by which they are allowed to *agree together*, *how far* they shall be 'of one accord and one mind ;' and defends the various creeds which do not 'speak the same thing.' For if, on the broad ground which these scriptural statutes sketch out, christians were 'of one mind,' or if the creeds did 'speak the same thing,' there would be no necessity to divide. The lecturer reasons inconclusively—he presses a mere non-sequitur as sound political sense—and recites quotations which nullify the very system of which he has been, gratuitously, or *ex cathedra*, the warm and earnest advocate.

It is a very easy, and unfortunately, a very common thing, to quote texts inconsiderately, or without looking at their connexions. A disputant seems to imagine that his readers will be satisfied with quotation marks, and never think of looking any farther. The religious community, he knows, are not readers of the bible ; or they read it in a manner so loose, that they will seldom suspect that a text, properly viewed, will prove directly the reverse of that which it is advanced to sustain. For example : The scriptural declaration of christian duty—in which all are exhorted to 'speak the same thing,' and which has been adduced

by Dr. M. in favour of the creed-system — who would suppose, when he considers the reputable pen that has transcribed it, that it occurs in the very heart of an exhortation against voluntary associations? Yet such is the fact. The passage is as follows — “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be *no divisions* among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them that are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name.”

Another example: All are commanded to be “of one accord, of one mind.” Who would ever suppose, considering the confidence with which the venerable lecturer employs the biblical phrase, that it is a direct prohibition of ecclesiastical contention? The apostle wrote his sentence thus — “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory.” He then goes on to describe the example of the Redeemer, who, by “making himself of no reputation, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself;” and thus consecrated, not an imperious and unyielding

control of human differences, but a kind and considerate condescension to human infirmities, as the principle of evangelic enterprise. After which the unity of Christ's kingdom, under his own single and supreme authority, is most beautifully and vividly set forth. "Wherefore," the apostle adds, "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name *which is above every name*, that *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that *every tongue should confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The UNITY of the Master's kingdom is thus commensurate with its EXTENT; and those belonging to it, or to whom its laws and institutions have come, are required to be of "one accord, of one mind — like-minded, having the same love." And the whole argument has been urged upon the consideration of the Philippian church, under the pressure of a train of melancholy circumstances, which the inspired writer himself briefly, but most expressively, states, — "All seek THEIR OWN, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."*

Who would ever have imagined that the apostle was discussing the value of voluntary associations, or of ecclesiastical creeds, when he penned these sentences? or that he was enjoining some duties which were utterly impracticable, unless christians should divide into different denominations? Yet Dr. M. has quoted his extracts in proof of the following proposition: — "Without a CREED explicitly adopted, it is not easy to see how the ministers and members of any particular church, and more especially a large denomination

* 2 Phil. i. 21.

of Christians, can maintain unity among themselves." Assuredly he must have made large calculations upon the ready credulity, or the superficial reading, of those whom he addressed; or perhaps he had forgotten the entire sentiment the apostle had intended to convey. It is exceedingly strange to me, that any respectable mind should thus abuse scriptural things, and that its clerical associates should not have vigour and candour enough to rebuke such casuistry.

But my reverend opponent proceeds—"How can any walk together except they be agreed? Can a body of worshippers, composed of calvinists, arminians, pelagians, arians and socinians, all pray, and preach, and commune together profitably and comfortably, each retaining the sentiments, feelings and language appropriate to his denomination? This would be indeed to make the house of God a miserable *Babel*." Here we have all the eloquence of a polemic, who, after his system has brought in the difficulties of which he complains, triumphantly asks, how the difficulties are to be managed without his system? and that too, when it is abundantly evident that they are managed no better with his system, than they would be without it; and when it seems to be forgotten, that these professing christians, who are described as disagreeing so widely, are all exhorted to be "of one accord and of one mind."

One cannot refrain from remarking, in what high-sounding terms statements like the preceding are made. Those terms are supposed to be accurate symbols of real divisions in the religious community—divisions as extensive as they are injurious. This view I take the liberty to question. A fair comparison of the va-

rious sects and their dogmas will evince, that the difference is not so great as interested sectarians represent them to be ; and that it rather consists in the philosophical explanations which they may have severally adopted, than in the real influence of principles upon their hearts and lives. It is truly astonishing what a multitude of misunderstandings and misrepresentations — of motives, sentiments, language and actions — there are abroad among professing christians ; and with what facility, as well as little compunction, they exchange reproaches and hard names. For myself, therefore, I should choose to reduce the matter to experiment, and judge from the account individuals may give of themselves, rather than from the antiquated charges, which are found in the various indictments transmitted from some former period of excitement and controversy.

Be these things as they may, our present question inquires after the scriptural provisions in such cases ; or whether the bible has prescribed an ecclesiastical CREED as the only remedial test ? If any have denied the Lord who bought them, or have abandoned the faith once delivered unto the saints, then cast them out of the church. Ah, there, it will be replied, is the very difficulty — HOW is such an one to be proved guilty of such dereliction ? To which I answer, — that the church which feels herself incompetent to advance unequivocal proof to substantiate such a charge, is bound by every fair judicial principle to let it alone : because, either her members are ignorant of the law the Master has given, and are therefore not proper judges — or, they are meddling with a case prematurely — or, they interfere with the essential

liberties of human beings, and those difficulties incident to human life, which no ecclesiastical court can control, and in which the "tares and the wheat must grow together." But ecclesiastical politicians seem to think that they can pluck up the tares without disturbing the wheat — that there is nothing which they cannot do, — and that nothing is to be left to divine providence.

But such a case does not present a fair view of the subject in hand. The inquiry is, how CHRISTIANS, — not infidels, — who disagree as to their statement of what are described to be "the fundamental principles of christianity," can "walk together" in "church fellowship?" This is represented to be impracticable. The attempt, it is said, would convert "the house of God into a miserable *Babel*." An ecclesiastical creed is the remedy proposed. Now is the remedy by DIVINE WARRANT? or have the scriptures legislated on the subject? Paul, who had so much to do with the controversies of his age, and to whom the Master had given wisdom to provide for various emergencies as they occurred, thus entreats the Philippians: — "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded," — which was to "press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus:" — "and if," he adds, "in any thing ye be *otherwise minded*, God shall *reveal even this* unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." The plain meaning of which is — Let us walk together as far as we know, and mind the same thing; let us hold fast our common profession, and hold on our common way to the end, and in the

good providence of God, all difficulties which would interfere with our fellowship shall soon disappear. We shall thus grow in knowledge, and grow more and more like to each other. Our fellowship will sustain a profitable action and re-action, mutual benefit shall be realized, and we shall advance together to perfection. The whole argument is founded on the real philosophy of human life and social action.

As has been already noticed, the Redeemer did not separate from the Jews; neither did the disciples. They waited the action of moral influence on the human mind, wistfully watching for the results of the converting, sanctifying, and assimilating process they had instituted. The Jewish sects did not separate from each other. The very heathen evinced more urbanity. And now, when our benevolent institutions have taught contending sects a little more good humour, and manifested the strong family likeness, ecclesiastics have more than enough to do to maintain their creeds. The facts belonging to the subject illustrate and confirm the philosophy which the apostle has taught us.—We have not yet obtained the **DIVINE WARRANT** of which we are in search.

In another part of his lecture, and in illustration of a proposition he had laid down, Dr. M. observes — “That the experience of all ages has found them (creeds) **INDISPENSABLY NECESSARY**.”—He remarks: “Even in the days of the apostles, when all their inspiration and all their miraculous powers were insufficient to deter heretics from spreading their poison, — men calling themselves Christians, and professing to preach the religion of Christ, perverted his truth, and brought ‘another gospel’ which he had not taught.

In this exigency, how did the churches proceed? An inspired apostle directed them not to be contented with a general profession of belief in the religion of Christ, on the part of those who came to them as christian teachers; but to EXAMINE and TRY, and to ascertain whether their teaching was agreeable to 'the form of sound words' which they had been taught by him: and he adds with awful solemnity—"If any man bring any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be ACCURSED." Here was, in EFFECT, an instance, and that by DIVINE WARRANT, of employing A CREED AS A TEST OF ORTHODOXY." He goes on to say that these teachers were required to state how they explained the leading doctrines of the gospel; and then admits that the CREED, so employed, was *short* and *simple*, as the circumstances of the times, and the no less peculiar administration of the church, rendered such an one entirely sufficient.

There were heresies then in abundance. The leading doctrines of the gospel were the same at that day that they are now. A short creed was enough then, but is not enough now; and the divine warrant for a short one, is a divine warrant for a long one. Thus the whole subject of creeds and confessions of faith, in all forms and sizes, is covered over with the mediatorial mantle, or comes to us with the sign-manual that no saint may question. Now each sect may proceed to act upon ITS OWN PRINCIPLES, without any danger of incurring the reproach of bringing in "another gospel." The question is settled finally and fully, and with most circumstantial detail. And yet after all, Dr. M. says, that the directions, and anathema, and "form of sound words," are only in EFFECT, a di-

vine warrant. This is all the length he can go, though he seems to be fully informed on the subject. If any one shall take a different view of the matter, as one might easily do, then the call for a **DIVINE WARRANT** remains unanswered.

Some things look exceedingly beautiful when put together ; but when taken apart, and considered separately, one wonders at the ingenuity that so happily blended them. Such seems to be the case in the argument now to be analyzed. How the texts in question establish the doctrine of ecclesiastical creeds is the curiosity. If they can do this thing, **CREEDS** must have been abundant in apostolic days : and it is very strange that none of them have reached our days. Dr. M. once asked, in his letters on the episcopal controversy — “ Where were the *liturgies* of those times ? Had forms of prayer been *so indispensably necessary*, or, at least, *so pre-eminently important*, as our episcopal brethren tell us they are, and always have been, why did not Paul, or some other of the apostles, furnish the churches with liturgies written by themselves, and under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost ? ” Changing terms, if *creeds* have been so *indispensably necessary* as, it is said, they always have been ; why did not some one of the apostles, under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, furnish the churches with them ? And if they did, as Dr. M. seems to intimate by his quotations they did in three different instances, where are these creeds — these forms of sound words ? It is a pity that not one of them can be produced. Such a document would settle the dispute, and relieve the church from those various and cumbrous articles, that now distract her members ; and which, instead of

silencing, have greatly multiplied heretics. The presumption is, that Dr. M. has been over-zealous in his argument. But let us analyze the texts.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but **TRY** the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The *first* question here is, *how* this **TRIAL** was to be conducted? Had the apostle furnished the church he addressed with a creed? or had they met together and framed one for themselves? Not at all. Nothing of the kind appears. No reference, not the most distant, is made to it. As though no rule of the sort had been uttered to, much less written for, them; or as though he would “stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance,” he simply remarks — “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-Christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world.”* Here then is the **CREED**, if any there was, by which they were to proceed; and lo, it is a part of the scriptures themselves. And cannot christians and teachers be **TRIED** in the same way now? No objection has been made to such a process. Or does Dr. M. mean to say, that as inspired men wrote the bible, therefore ecclesiastical councils may write a **BIBLE** now? No divine warrant, *in effect*, is here given to do any thing else. The puritans seem to have known of no such warrant, when they

*1 John, iv. 1, 3.

fled to the American wilderness; and took up their abode among unsanctified savages, to escape such prescriptions as the following, which they condemned as unrighteous, and as establishing a cruel, unrelenting, and degrading lordship over their consciences:

1. That no preacher, under a bishop or dean, shall make a set discourse, or fall into any common-place of divinity in his sermons, *not comprehended in the thirty-nine articles.*

2. That no parson, vicar, curate, or lecturer; shall preach any sermon hereafter, on Sundays or holy-days in the afternoon, but expound the catechism, creed, or ten commandments; and that those be most encouraged, who catechise children only.”*

A *second* question arises here: — Who were those whom the apostle called upon the brethren to reject? Were they believers, who disagreed as to the solution of some philosophical problem? some calvinistic, or arminian reasoners, who might live together in their own voluntary association, and worship God on their own principles? but with whom the party, at the head of which John places himself, could not hold “church fellowship?” Assuredly not. They were those, who, having denied that Jesus Christ had *come in the flesh*, had demonstrated that they *were not of God*. The text then has nothing to do with the subject of ecclesiastical creeds, as they have been defined by Dr. M. himself.

A *third* question remains: — Who were those whom the apostle addressed? An ecclesiastical *council*, of competent powers to arraign, examine, try, and con-

* Neale's *His. Par.* vol. ii. p. 153.

demn a class of brethren who disagreed with certain prescribed ecclesiastical forms? A PRESBYTERY, acting by virtue of a divine warrant, yet on their own motion and irrespective of the PEOPLE? By no means. By referring to the acts of the apostles, it will be found, that, when any church business was to be transacted, even PETER would not assume the rights belonging to the PEOPLE. Paul refers a case of discipline to the Corinthian church as "gathered together;" and reproves them for going to "law before the unjust and not before the saints," as though they had forgotten that "the saints shall judge the world," and as if there was not "a wise man among them" — "able to judge between his brethren." Lord King, whose researches into the peculiarities of the primitive church bespeak a man of profound study, and of great candour, tells us, that church censures, in those early ages, were inflicted by the WHOLE CHURCH, or were "the things commanded by the MULTITUDE." For the general facts, belonging to the subject of the *people's* interest in ecclesiastical matters, he quotes among others, Origen, Clemens Romanus, and Cyprian. Does Dr. M. mean to inform us, that in apostolic times, the PEOPLE assembled to make ecclesiastical creeds? If he did, he would then have to explain how it is, that the PEOPLE, in the Presbyterian church, have had nothing to do with the formation of their confession of faith? That book never had appeared in our world, if it had been waited for as emanating from that source. It is a tolerably fair presumption, from Dr. M's own account of the matter, that nine-tenths of the PEOPLE, even now, know nothing about that heavy volume.

But to return. It would seem, from the facts just adduced, that John was addressing himself to the PEOPLE. If their elders or officers were included, it was only as a part of the general association; and not in that distinctive capacity, of which so much has been said in later times, and by virtue of which, ministers and elders have done, and are doing, such wonderful things. Nor is any particular case referred to. No individual is arraigned. Hypothetical circumstances are stated. The abandonment of christianity, in the most general form, is brought up in a passing remark. In fine, instead of furnishing any sample of an ecclesiastical creed, or any evidence that such an instrument is indispensable, the apostle is simply appealing to the public conscience; and, by writing his portion of the sacred volume, according to the wisdom given unto him, is seeking to enlighten public opinion. Instead of originating or sustaining ecclesiastical power, as it is confidently set forth by official men; or multiplying abstract rules as a precedent, intended to encourage succeeding rulers to enact others, as numerous and as long as they may please, he is appealing to a higher and a better principle, and seeks to base public morals on public education. For such an operation a divine warrant may be found on any page of the bible. The bible, being intended to disseminate light and truth, instead of sustaining the exercise of power, that class of operations belongs to the philosophy of the human mind, and the avowed design of christianity itself.

Dr. M. has appropriated a *second* text, in proof of a divine warrant for an ecclesiastical creed, which is extracted from the epistle to the Galatians. It is as

follows — “If any man bring (PREACH) any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be ACCURSED.” — The reader perceives that the direction is given to the PEOPLE — for to them, a man, who comes PREACHING, would address himself. Besides an abandonment of christianity is the case contemplated, for “another gospel” is supposed to be preached. Neither of these things involves the attributes of the subject in hand. The divisions which are contemplated, separate calvinists and arminians into different associations; to live by themselves, and to walk on their own principles. It will not do for either party to say of the other — “These men abandon christianity — confess not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh — bring in another gospel, — and as anti-Christ let them be ACCURSED.”

The apostle thought the case important enough for extended observation, and his remarks are very striking. — “I certify you, brethren,” he writes, “that the gospel which was preached of me, is NOT AFTER MAN. For I neither received it OF MAN, neither was I taught it, but by the REVELATION of Jesus Christ.” Are not these ecclesiastical documents mere human inventions? after man? and received of man? Is not the bible given to us by the revelation of Jesus Christ? I pray, in which direction are we likely to find “another gospel?” By the deportment of the different sects, in separating for purposes of church fellowship, have they adopted a mere human device? or are they acting by the revelation of Jesus Christ? Are they not setting forth different gospels? Do they not criminate and recriminate? Have they not been irreconcilable in their feelings? Over whom then does

the contemplated vengeance apparently hang? Over those who are upholding the revelation which is by Jesus Christ? or those who are bringing in an exposition of doctrines, which is after man, and has been received of man? — called **THEIR OWN PRINCIPLES**.

The case which the apostle was adjudicating in this epistle was simply this. After the churches of Galatia had been established, in consequence of the preaching of the **GOSPEL**, some Judaic teachers were very busy in a series of endeavours to bring in *another law* of ecclesiastical compact and rule. It was the law of Moses; which had been, in preceding ages, unequivocally established by a divine warrant. These teachers peremptorily maintained the **INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY** of that law; cast out those who opposed them; and sided with the party that martyred both christians and apostles, who held fast by the simple gospel of Christ. But even the law, which had been enacted by Jehovah himself, Paul would not suffer to be enforced on the christian conscience. As long as the subject was open for discussion; the circumstances belonging to it, were strong and impressive enough to invite forbearance. But when the false brethren, of whom he complains, had adopted their ecclesiastical policy, and came in *privily* into the church, to *spy out* the liberty of her members, that by artifice and combination they might be seduced or compelled to **SUBSCRIBE** the law of Moses, the apostle rises against the *unwarrantable imposition*; pleads for the gospel itself as it had been given by *revelation*, and as it stood unaided by human device; exhorts believers to “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free;” and then

warns and entreats them — “Brethren, ye have been called to liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this:—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” And is it in a train of circumstances like these, that Dr. M. finds a divine warrant to ecclesiastics to bring in *their own rules*? And do they expect to find themselves sustained by this apostle, when talking of the difficulties of “church fellowship?” after he has so briefly and tersely said, in relation to that subject, — “ALL the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this — Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Verily, if the argument of the epistle has any thing to do with ecclesiastical creeds, it is to fix upon them the burning stigma of bringing in “another gospel.”

My brethren may possibly disclaim having such intentions, as the preceding argument would seem to impute to them. I beg leave to remark, that I am not criticising their intentions, nor making one single observation with the view of wounding their feelings. It is the doctrine they advance, and the argument they so inconsiderately use, which I arraign. We live in an age, when, though individuals are supposed to be very benevolent, yet *associations of all kinds* are unsparingly reviewed, and official men and measures are arraigned by public opinion. The ministry and ecclesiastical organizations may not reasonably expect to escape. The conclusion, which has been reached, may be thought too hard. Be it so. If I relax, the apostle must still be followed. He, offer-

ing a like gratifying indulgence, changes his ground, and then observes — It is “not another gospel, but there be some that trouble you, and would PERVERT the gospel of Christ.” Even a PERVERSION of the gospel, he will not sanction nor WARRANT. Look first at a calvinistic creed, and then at an arminian creed — compare papal, episcopal, presbyterian, and methodist forms of government together — read controversial writings, startling one by different views, various literature, ingenious argument, and cutting reproaches — are *all* these — are *any* of them — the gospel of Christ? Is there no *perversion* of the gospel, among these various creeds, — these different organizations? Or is not the fact now, as Paul stated it to be then? when the gospel preached was *after man*, or had been received *of man*? these creeds are mere PERVERSIONS. And for such things no man can find a *divine warrant*, nor reasonably expect any thing but divine condemnation.

Dr. M. has employed a *third* text in proof of a DIVINE WARRANT, in relation to ecclesiastical creeds. It is taken from Paul’s second epistle to Timothy, and is in the following words — “Hold fast the FORM of sound words which thou hast *heard* of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” This is a favorite text, and is frequently quoted in the service, which it is here enlisted to uphold. The Westminster confession is very often called “a form of sound words;” and it would be difficult to convince any of its admirers, that there is any thing unsound about it, notwithstanding that there is “no small stir” concerning its import. The mere euphony of the scriptural text beguiles a great many pious souls, and immoveably fix-

es the doctrine of creeds. One almost despairs of ever reaching the understanding, while this harmonious phrase rests so agreeably on the ear.

It is, however, a plain fact, as is evident from the text itself, that this "form" was not *written*. The most that Paul asserts concerning it is, that TIMOTHY had HEARD it from him. It was not then designed to be transmitted from generation to generation, unless protestants intend to revive the old doctrine of *tradition*; and take back, in the gross, the multitude of papal absurdities which they have so often abjured. They have indeed various fragments, both of doctrine and discipline, which they have brought with them from their old associations; and which are serious impediments, cramping and perplexing them when they would revive the papal controversy. Mankind, it would seem, were not prepared for liberty at the time of the reformation. They do not seem to be ready to enjoy that blessing even now. Ecclesiastical sovereignty, reposing in the rulers, not trusted with the people, nor even referred to the Head of the Church, appears to be their darling idol still; or synods and presbyteries would not dare to do, what they have but lately done. The argument, with which I have to contend, belongs to the subject of TRADITION, and like it must be sustained by appeals to the fathers.

In addressing the Thessalonians, Paul requires of them, — to "hold the traditions which they had been taught by WORD or the EPISTLE." What is the difference in these terms? Is the EPISTLE so much of the *bible*? the WORD an ecclesiastical *creed*? — and tradition different from both? Or is the well known distinction between *oral* and *written* communications

to be destroyed, and the glorious attributes of the *living teacher* to be thrown aside, in order to sustain the unreasonable prejudices and inconclusive reasonings of the defender of creeds? Then we have a *fourth* apostolic creed — but it is lost with the rest.

To the Romans he says: — “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that *form of doctrine* which was delivered unto you.” — A *fifth* creed, not even preserved by the church of Rome, that great reservoir of ecclesiastical antiquities, which so pompously unchurches all Christian associations but her own.

To the Corinthians he observes — “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with *wisdom of words*.” And again — “I came not to you with excellency of *speech* — my *speech* was not with the enticing *words* of man’s wisdom.” Let any one take a concordance, and observe the frequency with which this term is employed in the scriptures, and he will find that Dr. M. has mistaken a very familiar phrase for a technical expression.

Dr. Macknight, who was sufficiently orthodox, I presume, to be quoted on the text which Dr. M. has employed, remarks — “This is an insinuation that the false teachers had proudly and imperiously introduced into their discourses, a variety of high-sounding, mysterious *words* and phrases of their *own invention*, on pretence that they expressed the christian doctrines better than those used by the apostles. This bad practice Timothy was to resist, by adhering closely to the *words* and phrases in which the apostle taught him the doctrines of the gospel; and which he terms *wholesome words*, because, being *dictated by the Spirit*,

they are more fit for expressing the doctrines of Christ, than any words of human invention. — The teachers in modern times, who, in explaining the articles of the Christian faith, use phrases different from the scripture phraseology, would do well to attend to the apostolical injunction.”

When one remembers the importance of technical **TERMS**, and the extensive mischief which **THEY** have done, — in the schools of the philosophers, in the days of the apostles, under the reign of councils, and at the present hour — he can estimate the force of Paul’s remark to his son in the gospel. But how any man, who thinks outside of his early prejudices, could mistake the apostle, — who was instructing Timothy to remember the form of appropriate speech and of wholesome **WORDS** which he had **HEARD**, and which were not taught by “man’s wisdom,” but by “the Holy Ghost,” — as furnishing a precedent or sample of an ecclesiastical creed, in which words invented by man’s wisdom, and not by the Holy Ghost, are employed, it is difficult to see.

But why should I waste the time of the reader, in a gratuitous attempt to prove a negative? It belonged to Dr. M. to establish what he had said, instead of running away in smooth sentences from the very matter which required so much, and such clear elucidation. It was all-important to him to prove a *divine warrant* for the official instruments, which so recklessly cast an ingenuous youth out of the pale of the church; or send him backwards and forwards, from sect to sect, asking for the privileges which his heavenly Father has allowed none to monopolize, but has

freely given to all. — I leave on record a demand for the **DIVINE WARRANT**, by which ecclesiastical creeds have been introduced into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? I put the question home to the conscience of every minister of the gospel, whose eye may rest upon these pages, to whatever denomination, or to whatever party in that denomination, he may belong, as an honourable and candid servant of the glorified Master; that he may find out a **DIVINE WARRANT** for these instruments of ecclesiastical power, or return to his allegiance before he shall be required to give an account of his stewardship. And may the Holy Spirit, who teaches wise and wholesome words, rest on every minister who has moral magnanimity enough to meet the call, and do his duty. — In doing this, I beg to be considered as throwing out no boastful challenge to any one. I ask none to enter into controversy with me: but being fully assured that no such warrant can be produced, the question is left to every one to answer for himself, that a personal investigation may dissipate the withering delusion under which so many live.

CHAPTER V.

Subject continued. Voluntary associations destitute of Scriptural authority.

Though Dr. M. has altogether failed, as I have shown in the preceding chapter, to establish his point by a *direct* appeal to the bible, yet he might have *indirectly* accomplished his object, had he furnished a

scriptural warrant for voluntary associations. For if Jehovah had permitted such associations, over and above and beside the constitutional organization of his church, then laws must be provided for these sectarian divisions; and if he did not furnish those laws, the power to enact them must be lodged in the associations themselves. The Dr. has, however, offered no proof of the kind. A warm admirer of voluntary associations, he sustains them on an entirely different principle. And yet, if they be as important and as indispensable, and as entirely dependent on the volitions of man, as he says they are, it is strange that the scriptures should have said nothing about them; unless it be to record an unqualified condemnation of all such pretensions. The Spirit of prophecy apprised the apostles of such ecclesiastical movements: for Paul said to the Ephesians — “I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking PERVERSE things, TO DRAW AWAY DISCIPLES AFTER THEM.” He told the Thessalonians, that “the man of sin” would be revealed; and “that he, as God, should SIT IN THE TEMPLE of God, showing himself that he is God.” Every appearance of such divisions in his own day, he severely rebuked; nor did he ever make one single exception in favour of “voluntary associations,” as though they were altogether a different thing from that which he thus severely reproveth. These things deserved to be met, explained, and answered, and located with those whom they concerned. But not one word has Dr. M. uttered, which can be traced to “the form of sound words,” which the apostles either spake or wrote.

Yet Dr. M. has a good deal to say about voluntary associations, and in elucidation of the RIGHT which christians have thus to divide the church. His argument may be canvassed here, as properly as in any other part of the essay. It fairly belongs to an inquiry after the origin of creeds, seeing that they are framed by those who have ascertained how far they can walk together in "church fellowship." — To begin then. He observes,

"It will probably be alleged, that a church cannot, properly speaking, be considered as a voluntary association; that it is a community instituted by the authority of Christ; that its laws are given by him, as its sovereign Head and Lord; and that its rulers are in fact only stewards, bound to conform themselves in all that they do to his will; that, if the church were *their own*, they would have a right to shut out from it whom they pleased; but as it is Christ's, they must find some other rule of proceeding than their own VOLITIONS. THIS IS, DOUBTLESS, ALL TRUE. The church of Christ cannot be regarded as a mere voluntary association, in the same sense in which many other societies are so called. It is the property of Christ. His will is the basis and the law of its establishment; and, of course, none can be admitted or excluded but upon principles which his own word prescribes." All this is very well; — just as it should be. If sectarians would only return to this ground, our controversy should be terminated.

But Dr. M. goes on. — "This, however, it is conceived, does not alter one jot or tittle the spirit of the foregoing reasoning." Thus he gives and takes. A part of "the foregoing reasoning" alluded to, is

thus expressed: — “It will not, surely, be denied by any one, that a body of christians have a **RIGHT**, in every free country, to associate and walk together upon such principles as they may **CHOOSE** to agree upon, not inconsistent with public order. They have a **RIGHT** to agree and declare how they understand the scriptures; what articles found in the scripture they concur in considering as fundamental; and in what manner they will have their public preaching and polity conducted, for the edification of themselves and their children.” — In the one paragraph, it seems that christians “must find some other rule of proceeding than their **OWN VOLITIONS** ;” and in the other, “they have a **RIGHT** to associate on such principles as they may **CHOOSE** to agree upon.”

To what kind of **RIGHT** does the venerable lecturer refer? To a right derived from a “free country,” in which we may live? A free country has no more power to grant to christians a **RIGHT** to divide into voluntary associations, than a despotic government has; or than such a government has a **RIGHT** to erect an ecclesiastical establishment. It is not a question, which the civil power is competent to decide. The **RIGHT**, if any exists, is wholly independent of a political grant from any earthly legislature. It is awarded to the church by the king of kings; and Dr. M. ought to have brought his warrant directly from the Lord himself, instead of beguiling his readers by an appeal to American partialities. Unless he can do this, he fails to prove the **RIGHT**, either in a “free country” or any other.

But christians have a **RIGHT**, “in a free country,” to do — what? The answer to this question must be

derived from the details afforded by the exercise of the right. They have a **RIGHT**,—one party to declare the supremacy of the pope—another party to declare that episcopacy is established “by divine right”—a third party to declare the scriptural character of presbytery—a fourth to aver the superior excellence of methodist policy, &c. Surely there is no supreme Head, on Dr. M’s principles, to whom it belongs to settle such distractions. All these parties, he assumes, have a **RIGHT** to do all these things. There is no one to prevent them. An establishment, which, in other days and other countries, exerted a controlling power, forms no part of the institutions of a “free country,” and such contentions christians may carry as far as they “**CHOOSE**.” The ecclesiastical politicians of the old world cannot see how such a state of things can last; and those of the new world are very strongly suspected of leaning to an establishment. I charge not the brethren of any denomination with a project so detestable; but merely note, in passing, the public impression, while professed christians are sustaining, what is called their “**RIGHT** in every free country.” Is there no power to control these erring **VOLITIONS**? which Dr. M. condemns in one paragraph, and commends in another. What has become of the Spirit of truth and unity, which the Lord Jesus promised should dwell in his church? Have christians no confidence in that all-pervading and transforming agency? Has the advocate of creeds, and when asserting such rights, furnished us with *another* proof, that, while he is so freely criticising others as unbelievers and heretics, his own system destroys the whole doctrine of **FAITH**?

The papacy may plead the same **RIGHT**. Politicians say so, and meddle not with her massy polity. But have not protestants most unreservedly condemned the ecclesiastical autocrat, as sitting in the temple of God, as though he were God, enacting laws, and demanding submission? "In a free country" does Dr. M. say that all this is his **RIGHT**? Are not those who bow to the will of "the universal bishop," and chant his praises, equally as voluntary as the members of other churches? or will not the protestant fly to the **BIBLE**? as condemning the whole system. As Dr. M. himself said, when contending with episcopalians — "The word of God is the only perfect and infallible rule of faith and practice. The moment we quit this ground, we are plunged into all the uncertainty of tradition, and into all the confusion of contradictory testimony. The moment we quit this ground, the defence of protestants against the papists is impossible. In this general principle our episcopal brethren concur." Yet, in stating his argument for voluntary associations, he is entirely away from biblical ground, and does not think it worth his while to defend them by scriptural warrant or statute.

The members of the same denomination may differ in some of their views, and may carry out their own measures. They have equal **RIGHTS** in a free country. Having divided under the laws of God, they may surely, with far less guilt, divide under *their own*. It will not do to reply, that the compact into which the denomination entered has been violated; for both parties that shall arise may be equally attached to the creed adopted in common. It would be difficult to say, which party shall love it the most ardently.

Neither will it do to say, that one party should withdraw ; for claiming an equal interest in the ecclesiastical institute under which they live, no one can decide which should go, and which should stay. In a free country the government may not decide, having nothing to do with such matters, unless peradventure a question of *property* should arise ; and then even the most orthodox cannot let go their interest, though they should be small in number, and have contributed but little of their worldly goods.

When in Corinth, one said, "I am of Paul ; another, I am of Apollos ; and another, I am of Peter ; and another, I am of Christ" — they had a RIGHT to do so, according to the argument under consideration ; for who was to prevent them ? Yet Paul cried shame on such carnality. Nor did he ever mention to them the freedom, or slavery, resulting from their political institutions ; but simply said — "Is Christ divided ? was Paul crucified for you ? or were you baptized in the name of Paul ?" Will not such questions apply with equal force to these boasted RIGHTS ? which, in the present state of christian intelligence and feeling, no one seems to have courage or magnanimity to deny.

But Dr. M. is not prepared to go the whole length of his own principle. He puts it under restriction, and makes an exception in favour of PUBLIC ORDER. Is there any "public order" in the christian church, which these contending sects disturb ? Or is that order of little consideration ? — a trifle in the view of men who wish to ascertain how far they can agree ; and who would extend or limit their "church fellowship" on their own principles, or according to their

own volitions. Has the Head of the Church granted to her members any **RIGHT** to disturb the political arrangements he has established? or did he not command all his followers, to maintain the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace? to be “of one accord, of one mind?” to “speak the same thing?” to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind?”

The reader may well ask whether Dr. M. does not sustain the policy he starts by some argument? Certainly. I shall state one or two things, as a sample.

1. “The union of Christians in a church state, must, from the nature of things, be a *voluntary act*; for if it were not so, it would not be a *moral act* at all.” I suppose that he means, that every man must do his **DUTY** willingly—with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. This no one questions. Slavery is a miserable thing. There is, how much? morality in doing a duty by force. But does it follow, that, because human beings do their duty from a willing mind, they may divide into various associations, which is not their duty? This is Phaeton driving the chariot of Phœbus. Sin, committed in a voluntary manner, thus becomes sanctified by volition, until a bolt of wrath drives the transgressor to perdition.

But I have a question to ask here. Does Dr. M. mean to say, that it is not a man’s *duty* to attach himself to the church of Christ, unless he does it *voluntarily*? Or, is the sinner’s *volition*, and not the law of God, the rule of his duty? May he consider Jehovah a hard master, and lay up his gift in a napkin, and do no wrong? The citizens of the United States owe allegiance to the government—civil government is an ordinance of God—we must be subject to the higher

powers. May any one of these citizens, happening to be in a bad humour, or CHOOSING his own way, decline that allegiance? and thereby do no wrong? Or because he should cheerfully acknowledge the government, has he therefore a RIGHT to attach himself to a party, erect a government within the constitutional limits of the government of the country, and make laws for himself? Or may any of the members of any of the states, so act towards the state authority, because they CHOOSE to do so? Who may erect a monarchy in the heart of the republic? or supersede the supreme power by his own VOLITIONS?

2. Sectarian theologians are generally apt to represent the relation between a human being and the church of Christ, as simply depending on mental volitions. He is supposed to APPLY, and the church to RECEIVE him. Dr. M. is very free in representations of this kind, in maintaining his doctrine of voluntary associations. But it is my DUTY to observe the ordinances of Christ's house; and it is the DUTY of the church not to interfere with me. I may indeed be a reprobate, and then it is her DUTY to cast me out. The Master has given law to regulate such a case. That matter is not under dispute. I am not a reprobate. My character is good. Not being an official man, I cannot baptize myself. It is then the DUTY of the minister of the sanctuary to baptize me. By what RIGHT does he refuse me? The Saviour commanded me to eat the bread, and drink the wine in remembrance of him. Who has any RIGHT to prevent me from doing what the Lord commanded me? He told his disciples to go and preach his gospel to *every creature*; why should I not ask — CALL — a minister to

preach to me? Did the Master ever place it at the option of the church, whether I should or should not do these things? He has constituted the church as his servant to urge me to do these things, not to prevent me. And even if disagreement on various subjects might be suspected — or be actually known — he commanded her not to trifle with my conscience. — “Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations. — Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant?” And yet Dr. M. and those who agree with him, talk about *judging*, and *receiving* and *refusing*, as though they really had the RIGHT.

It may be replied, that Dr. M. has said that under such circumstances, the church of God would be a miserable *Babel*. He has said many things, which as a freeman I choose to *examine* and *try*, that it may appear whether they are of God: and I cannot be put off by embellishment, and exaggeration, and hyberbole. It is to be questioned whether he has ever looked calmly and coolly at the matter: No disrespect is intended in this remark. Theologians have talked so much and so long about *uniformity*, and have been so much *infatuated* by their ideas of ecclesiastical power, that to suggest the idea of the wheat and the tares growing together, is in their esteem, perhaps, the very vilest of all heresies. Then their glance is altogether one-sided. For look at the church now. Begin with the papacy, and number up the different sects; and if *Babel* means confusion — confusion of ideas, and language, and interests, — is not the church a *Babel* now? The reader will please not put me away from my question, nor

the question from himself:—where is the RIGHT? WHO gave it? to WHOM has it been entrusted? by which I am prevented from doing the DUTY, which the King and Head of the church has assigned to me. How have ministers and the church escaped from their own DUTY to receive me, and to treat me with all the urbanity, and kindness, and affection, due to a brother? Take away these voluntary associations, in which certain classes of Christians agree to walk together in “church fellowship,” and which the Lord Jesus never commanded, but which his word has most pointedly forbidden, and all difficulty is gone. Every christian then finds his place; every minister then knows his duty; and the church becomes what the Lord intended his church should be,—a brotherhood betokening its heavenly origin by mutual love,—the praise and beauty of the whole earth.

I feel myself constrained here to inquire—what is the CHURCH? To what political association, in its most general sense, is that term applied? The fair and full consideration of this question would lead, I apprehend, to the conclusion, that the CHURCH and the ELECTION are the same thing. God’s *saints*, or *sanc-tified*, or *elect* ones, whom he has separated from the rest of the world, whom he has chosen in consequence of the idolatrous defection of mankind after the flood, to accomplish the purpose of his will, and has consecrated as his official agents to proclaim and preserve truth in the world,—these constitute his CHURCH. The whole Jewish NATION was his CHURCH, under the former economy. And gentile NATIONS, who have received the gospel, and are called by the name, of his Son, are now his CHURCH. Hence Peter’s strong

and expressive language — “Ye are a *chosen generation*, an *holy nation*, a *peculiar people*.”

It is against this CHURCH, that Jesus says, in strong figurative language, “the gates of hell,” or Hades, or the grave, “shall not prevail.” He seems to quote a figurative allusion of Isaiah, who said — “Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. And they shall speak, and say unto thee — Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations.”* — The gates — which were the places of public resort in ancient times — the gates of Hades, — the grave — or hell, shall not be crowded with chief ones and kings, to triumph over the CHURCH, as fallen, and say — “Art thou become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? THY pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. Thou art brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.” Christ’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. It shall not pass away as other kingdoms have fallen. The church shall live while her head lives. The Jewish church remained, according to the promise, until Shiloh came, notwithstanding her priesthood was most

* Is. xiv. 9, 15.

debased. And Christ's church shall live, though the infallibility of her priesthood shall be demonstrated by their vices to be a childish fable, borrowed from days and years of degrading superstition ; though, as catholics say of protestants, and protestants say of catholics, and the Spirit of prophecy foretold at large, many false prophets and false teachers should arise. This CHURCH, based on the broad principles I have defined, shall live and flourish, shall arise and put on her beautiful garments ; when voluntary associations, with popery at their head, shall sink down, in prophetic language, fallen, and covered with worms, amid the shoutings of the gates of Hades.

If I have rightly judged the matter, then these voluntary associations are an assumption of Jehovah's prerogative to ELECT a church ; and a presumptuous imitation of his high "purpose of election," which has been described as "the mystery of HIS WILL." By what *scriptural warrant* have any class of christians proceeded to take such a step? And on the other hand, as election implies REPROBATION, by what *scriptural warrant* have they undertaken to reprobate their fellow saints as unworthy of "church fellowship?"

My idea of the CHURCH may probably provoke a smile. But do away these voluntary associations, for which no divine warrant can be produced, and see if the thing would not be as has been described? The objection, that there are a great many vicious people in christian lands, would not sustain the smile. For such persons abound in voluntary associations, their own advocates being the judges. Nay with all their varied policy, and different creeds, how far can they get away from the ground I have sketched out? Can

any one tell what is the difference, or whether it amounts to any thing, when a priest, a bishop, or a presbyter *preaches*? when a minister is ordained by the imposition of the hands of one man, or those of half a dozen? When the affairs of a congregation are managed by a vestry, a session, a committee, a board of stewards, or a circle of deacons? Between a state convention, a state synod, a state conference, and a state association? or between a general convention, a general synod, a general assembly, a general conference, and a general association? Between men who love the Lord Jesus, believe in his name, and keep his commandments; or those who love God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind, and with all their strength, and love their neighbour as themselves; when called episcopalians, presbyterians, methodists, &c.? The public mind is deceived; not intentionally, yet most grossly deceived. The likeness is necessarily a common one. Do away these voluntary associations, and it will grow more distinct and lovely. "Church fellowship will restore order, harmony, and a thousand good offices, which are now absorbed in the selfishness of sect. Endless jealousies and animosities are the fruit of a proselyting spirit, which merges the church in a party. And the grasping ambition, which cherishes the lust of numbers, and floats on the stream of public curiosity, annual statistics of a boasted growth, awakes the fear of a union between church and state. See what sectarianism is doing, amid loud pretensions to wisdom and purity. Is it right? Have christians a **RIGHT** to do these things in a free country? Has God commanded them? Is Christ divided?

If I have taken one step off from biblical ground,

or aside of facts, which any man may see, I submit to be rebuked. But if my statements are correct, and may be investigated, the reader must search for himself, and may not reprove until he has examined. To our own Master, we severally stand or fall; and may that Master abundantly bless his own CHURCH, and bestow the Spirit—not of voluntary associations—but of unity and truth on all her MINISTERS.

CHAPTER VI.

Subject Continued—Early Creeds.

THE proposition at present under consideration is—“That the experience of ALL AGES has found creeds indispensably necessary.” The first fact in proof of that proposition, has been professedly brought from the scriptures, and avers that the apostles themselves used an ecclesiastical CREED, and directed the churches and their officers to employ IT as a test of orthodoxy. In this way a DIVINE WARRANT, in EFFECT at least, has been confidently asserted to exist; *i. e.* a summary of scriptural doctrines has been supposed to have been found before the scriptures themselves were written; and while the apostles themselves were learning, under the teaching of the Spirit, and from the experiment they were making, what the doctrines of evangelic truth and of the new testament association really are.

The reader must have seen, as I have been passing through the foregoing chapters, that all, which the advocates of creeds can say in that direction, is mere assumption; and by comparing the whole with certain

circumstances growing out of the nature of the case, and recorded by the inspired writers, — such as, the election of men to superintend the daily ministration, — the discussion at Jerusalem on the binding obligation of the Mosaic law, — the contest between Paul and Peter, — the comments which Peter passes on the epistles of Paul — the appeals made to apostolic pens by various churches — the controversies that were common at that period, and on fundamental principles too, — he must be fully satisfied that no apostle was competent to frame a CREED. Each apostle was himself a learner ; was a student of the old testament ; was an observer of circumstances as they occurred ; and was permitted to go no farther than as the Spirit gave him utterance. While the Lord himself was on earth, and was engaged in teaching his disciples the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, he told them no more than they were “able to bear ;” but proceeded gradually and waited for the development of circumstances. And when those disciples became “ambassadors in his stead,” his Spirit suffered them not to treat the world more inconsiderately than they had been treated themselves. It was impossible, therefore, that an ecclesiastical CREED could have been framed by these patriarchs of the new dispensation. The new testament scriptures were furnished by them as an exhibition of the doctrines to be preached by their successors, and no other “summary” drawn out by them can any where be found.

But if the apostles did not frame a CREED, other than their epistles, perhaps the succeeding age supplied the deficiency. It must soon have appeared, according to the argument it has fallen to my lot to re-

view, that the bible alone, — **ABSOLUTELY ALONE**, — was not sufficient, seeing that the most corrupt, as well as the most excellent, could have such a test. The apostolical fathers would quickly assemble, heresies would abound, unitarianism would prevail, infidelity itself would trample down the ineffectual barrier, and nothing but the interference of some ecumenical council could save the sinking church. Accordingly Dr. M. tells us — “In the *second* century, in the writings of Irenæus, and in the *third*, in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Gregory Thaumaturgus, and Lucian the martyr, we find a number of creeds and confessions, more formally drawn out, more minute, and more extensive than those of earlier date. They were intended to bear testimony against the various forms of error which had arisen; and plainly show, that, as the arts and corruptions of heretics increased, the orthodox church found more attention to the adoption and maintenance of these formularies indispensably necessary.”* All this, I hope to show, in reference to the subject of the present controversy, is mere verbiage. But first, the reader may consider with himself, how far such facts, even if they testified all they are adduced to prove, are worth?

It is doubtless a most unhappy circumstance, that the corruptions of society, both ecclesiastically and politically, can be traced back to so early a period. If the decisions of such mighty chieftains as Alexander or Cæsar were final in all controversies involving the question of civil liberty, what would political phi-

*Lec. pp. 26. 27.

losophers do in the present day? or what comments should we pass upon the American revolution and its consequent agitations among the nations? saving that the whole matter is egregiously wrong, and can end in nothing but anarchy and licentiousness. Antiquity often arrays vice in the lovely attire of virtue; frequently consecrates error as invaluable and divine; and by *tradition* sustains the papacy itself. Dr. M. himself says, that here “the defence of protestantism against the papists is impossible.” Here, too, episcopacy raises her head, and attempts to speak in loudest and most confident tones to the slumbering conscience of christians. In short, what religious denomination does not boast of its lineage? and “minister questions” by arraying “endless genealogies?” What disputant now appears on the theological field, who is not flushed with victory, in proportion as he is able to enlist great names in his favour? And why is it so? Is that which is *old*, necessarily *right*? Has the world undergone no changes in modern times? Have the circumstances of society been in nothing modified? Is the intellect of man too much degenerated in the present day, to permit him to think, judge, decide, and act for himself?

“In the kingdom of Christ,” says Dr. Wilson, “laws, ordinances, and offices are all prescribed and adjusted with precision; innovation is disobedience; an unauthorized office is insubordination and rebellion. The commission and duties of the gospel herald are spread upon the same pages of that word which he is to preach; that he may know his own obligations, and the people how he is to be regarded. Offices erected in the church, after the removal of in-

spired men, are unlawful, whether in ancient or modern times. If such offices can be justified on the conjectural ground of convenience, so may ordinances, and we may teach for doctrines the commandments of men.”*

Dr. Miller says — “We are accustomed to look back to the first ages of the church with a veneration nearly bordering on superstition. *It answered the purposes of popery*, to refer all their corruptions to primitive times, and to represent those times as exhibiting the models of all excellence. But every representation of this kind must be received with distrust. The Christian church, during the apostolic age, and for half a century, did indeed present a venerable aspect. Persecuted by the world on every side, she was favoured in an uncommon measure with the presence and Spirit of her divine Head, and exhibited a degree of simplicity and purity, which has, perhaps, never since been equalled. But before the close of the *second* century, the scene began to change; and before *the commencement of the fourth*, a deplorable corruption of doctrine, discipline, and *morals*, had crept into the church, and disfigured the body of Christ. Hegesippus, an ecclesiastical historian, declares that the “*virgin purity of the church was confined to the days of the apostles.*”† And yet there were CREEDS, appropriate in size and character, and which are the boasted instruments of purity and harmony, then framed and solemnly adopted. Can Dr. M. tell the public what good they did? or how the church became so corrupt under such a happy and efficient adminis-

* Prim. Gov. of Chris. Ch. pp. 1, 2.

† Letters on Epis. pp. 290. '1.

tration? Surely his history of creeds is a mere fable of tradition, or of his own invention, or they were good for nothing.

Again — “Even supposing you had found such declarations in *SOME* or *ALL* of the early fathers, what then? Historic fact is not divine institution.”*

Once more — “Suffer me, my brethren, again to remind you of the principle on which we proceed, in this part of our inquiry. If it could be demonstrated from the writings of the fathers, that in one hundred, or even in fifty years,† after the death of the last apostle, the system of diocesan episcopacy had been generally adopted in the church, it would be nothing to the purpose. As long as *no traces of this fact* can be found in the *bible*, but *much of a directly opposite nature*, we should stand on a secure and immoveable foundation. To *all reasonings, then*, derived from the *fathers*, I answer with the venerable Augustine, who, when pressed with the authority of Cyprian, replied, — ‘His writings I hold not to be canonical, but examine them by the canonical writings: and in them, what agreeth with the authority of divine scripture, I accept, with his praise; what agreeth not, I reject with his leave.’”‡ Here, by the way, I may remark, that as Dr. M. has referred to a *CREED* in the writings of Cyprian, Augustine has thus completely disposed of it — a matter belonging to that eulogized father, but of no sort of *authority* in the church. A mere uncanonical thing, which even his own age would not have accepted as a test of orthodoxy.

* Letters on Epis. p. 164.

† In four years, or four centuries, he remarks in another place.

‡ Ib. p. 149.

If such be the estimate in which the fathers are to be held ; if, as has been often asserted, they are frequently inconsistent with themselves, and with one another ; if the quotations made from their writings evince that they were not very extraordinary men ; and if corruptions began under their auspices, as early as the *second* century, and have continued ever since ; why should they be so often called upon in discussing the theological problems, or the political questions, which belong to the church ? Or why should an acquaintance with their works, or an ability to furnish extracts from their volumes, be reputed as ministerial literature ? Shall the community consider the parade of such useless learning to evince great attainments in moral science ? Manifestly this boasted acquisition is of no other use than to exhibit the mere history of other ages ; and it can bring no authority to settle any thing. Here then I might leave the appeal to the early ages, as not deserving to be prosecuted. But the argument in favour of creeds has been sustained by that appeal ; the superstitious regard that is paid to the fathers, notwithstanding *all* that Dr. M. has said about them, under the impression that they were all good, wise, and great men, calls for some forbearance ; and the origin of creeds, as an historical question, may be both curious and interesting. I shall quote from men who have professedly examined the books of the fathers at large, and whose character for erudition and integrity rate sufficiently high for my purpose.

In his introduction, and when detailing the subjects of which he conceived himself called to treat, Mosheim remarks — “ In that part of sacred history

which relates to the doctrines of christianity, it is necessary, above all things, to inquire particularly into the degree of authority that has been attributed to the sacred writings, in all the different periods of the church; and also into the manner in which the divine doctrines they contain have been explained and illustrated. For the true state of religion in every age can only be learned from the point of view in which these sacred oracles were considered, and from the manner in which they were expounded to the people. **AS LONG AS THEY WERE THE ONLY RULE OF FAITH, RELIGION PRESERVED ITS NATIVE PURITY ;** and in proportion as their decisions were either neglected or postponed to the inventions of men, it degenerated from its primitive and divine simplicity.”*

“ The method of teaching the sacred doctrines of religion was, at this time, most simple, far removed from all the subtle rules of philosophy, and all the precepts of human art. This appears abundantly, not only in the writings of the apostles, but also in all those of the second century, which have survived the ruins of time. **NEITHER DID THE APOSTLES, OR THEIR DISCIPLES,** ever think of collecting into **A REGULAR SYSTEM** the principal doctrines of the Christian religion, or of demonstrating them in a scientific and geometrical **ORDER.** The beautiful and candid simplicity of these early ages rendered such philosophical niceties **UNNECESSARY ;** and the great study of those who embraced the gospel, was rather to express its divine influence in their dispositions and actions, than to examine its doctrines with an excessive curiosity, or to explain them by the **RULES OF HUMAN WISDOM.**

* Eccl. Hist. Int. p. 5.

“ There is indeed extant, a brief *summary* of the principal doctrines of Christianity in that *form*, which bears the name of THE APOSTLE’S CREED, and which, from the *fourth* century downwards, was almost generally considered as a production of the apostles. All, however, who have the least knowledge of antiquity, look upon this opinion as entirely false and destitute of all foundation. There is much more reason and judgment in the opinion of those, who think that this creed was not all composed at once ; but from small beginnings was imperceptibly augmented, in proportion to the growth of heresy, and according to the exigencies and circumstances of the church, from whence it was designed to banish the errors that daily arose.”*

This historian has nothing to report of the ecclesiastical CREEDS of the early ages. He affirms that the apostles did not make a creed — that their disciples did not make one — that there was no necessity for any such thing — that as long as the bible was the ONLY rule of faith, religion flourished in its native purity ; but that it degenerated whenever the decisions of the sacred oracles were postponed to the inventions of men — that human HEARTS were then the DEPOSITORIES of truth, and the LIVES of men its WITNESSES, — and that the brief document, called the apostles’ creed, obtained its ecclesiastical eminence in, or about, the FOURTH century.

Du Pin, a catholic historian, refers to the apostles the *doctrine* contained in the document called “ the apostles’ creed,” but demonstrably proves that they

* Vol. 1, pp. 113, 114.

never framed its *form*. He refers to some other "ancient creeds," belonging, it would appear, to different churches, but in a manner so indistinct and confused, that it is difficult to ascertain what he would affirm. He observes,

"1. Neither St. Luke in the Acts, nor any ecclesiastical author before the fifth century, hath made any mention of this assembly of the apostles,* and none ever affirmed that they composed the creed of the church of *Rome*, either by conferring together, or by pronouncing every one a particular article.

"2. The fathers of the first three ages, disputing against the heretics, endeavour to demonstrate by many arguments, that the doctrine contained in the creed is that of the apostles, but they do not affirm that it was compiled by them; and yet there could not have been a stronger or more convincing proof against the heretics, than to have said thus to them:— You impugn the doctrine of the creed, and yet it is certain that the apostles were the authors thereof; therefore you impugn the doctrines of the apostles. However, they did not argue in this manner; on the contrary, they prove by *tradition*, and *the consent of the apostolical churches*, that the doctrine comprised in the creed, is that of the apostles.

"3. If the apostles had made a creed, it would have been every where the same throughout *all churches*, and in *all ages*; all christians would have learned it by heart; all churches would have repeated it after the same manner; in fine, all others would have expressed it in the same terms. Now the con-

* That in which the creed was supposed to have been framed.

trary is evident; for it is certain that not only in the second and third centuries, but also in the fourth, there were many creeds; and all, though the same as to the doctrine, yet differed in the expression. In the second and third ages of the church, we find *as many creeds as authors*; and the same author sets the creed down *after a different manner* in several places of his works; which plainly shows, that there was not then any creed that was reputed to be the apostles', **NOR EVEN ANY REGULATED AND ESTABLISHED FORM OF FAITH.** Ruffinus, in the *fourth* century, compares three ancient creeds of the churches of Aquileia, Rome, and the East; and we may observe in these three creeds, none of which perfectly agrees with the common one, very considerable differences in the terms, as appears from the table subjoined at the end of the article.* St. Cyril of Jerusalem, (in the *fourth* century) in his catechetical lectures, produceth a particular creed, that was used by the church at Jerusalem when this father wrote. The authors that have written commentaries on the creeds, as St. Augustin in his 119th sermon, St. Maximus, Petrus Chrysologus, Fortunatus, and others, omit divers expressions that are inserted in our apostolic creed,—among others this at the end,—*the life everlasting*; and St. Jerome observes in his epistle to Pammachius, that the creed concludes with the words, the resurrection of the body.

“It is evident from these reflections, that although the creed be the apostles as to the doctrine which it contains, nevertheless it is not theirs, as to all the

* It may be found in the history.

terms, and that they did not draw up ANY ONE FORM OF FAITH comprehended in a set number of words, which they were all *obliged to use*. But that having learned the same faith from Jesus Christ, they likewise taught it to all those that were converted to the Christian religion, and instructed them all in the same mysteries. That they that were thus trained up in this faith, had it *so deeply imprinted on their mind*, as St. Justin and St. Irenæus observe, that they were always ready to give an account thereof, and as often as they should be required to do it, *without making use of any one particular form*; and from thence proceeds the difference of the creeds that are set down by the fathers. And lastly, that *for the assistance of the memory*, certain forms of these articles of faith were *afterwards compiled*, which were found to be different, according to the diversity of the churches wherein they were used. For I doubt not in the least, that besides the above cited creeds, there were many others of which we have no knowledge, from whence it must be inferred, that Jesus Christ is the author of the doctrine contained in the creed, and that the apostles preached and published it throughout the whole world; but that it cannot be determined by whom these FORMS were collected, wherein this doctrine is comprised."

To the objection which might be made to the preceding statement — that Irenæus, Tertullian, Lucifer Calaritanus and St. Jerome affirm, "that the creed is *the rule of faith* which the church hath received from the apostles, &c." — Du Pin replies, "To these objections I answer, 1. That the testimonies of Irenæus, Tertullian, and Lucifer, rather overthrow the vulgar

opinion than establish it; for these fathers do not assert, that we have received the FORM of faith from the apostles, but only the faith and doctrine that were communicated to them by Jesus Christ; therefore, if there were any force in the objection, it must be concluded, that our Saviour is the author of the creed. Moreover, it is farther to be observed, that by the phrase RULE OF FAITH, used by Tertullian, A SET FORM OF FAITH is not to be understood, but *the faith itself*, which he declares to have been founded by Jesus Christ; and Lucifer Calaritanus doth not discourse of the *creed*, but only of the faith of the church as it relates to our Saviour's divinity. Lastly, when St. Jerome says, that the faith of the creed, which was an apostolical tradition, *was not written on paper, or with ink, but was engraved on the fleshly tables of the heart*, he gives us to understand, that he meant nothing else, but that the faith or doctrine comprehended in the creed proceeds from the apostles, who have taught it to all the faithful. After the same manner, when St. Ambrose assures us, that the creed was preserved in its purity by the church of Rome, he doth not speak of THE FORM of the creed, but of the doctrine therein contained."*

In another place the same author affirms, that—
 “Every bishop instructed his own people in the true faith of the church, and confuted all sorts of errors by the authority of scripture and tradition—in the first three ages of the church.”†

The above extract, though the most favourable account of the early creeds I have met with, is much

*Ecc. His. vol. i. Apos. Creed. Fol.

† Ib. Art. Councils.

longer than I could have wished. On it I may remark, that the author, though a catholic, proves,

1. That there was no **CREED**, other than the bible, handed down from the apostles : of course there is no divine precedent for such an instrument.

2. That there was no “regulated and established **FORM** of faith derived from any other source, during the first three ages.

3. That **creeds** were so abundant as to be as numerous as *authors* : nay, that the same author expressed the creed, found in his own works, in different words in different places ; a fact which leaves a creed as “a form of sound words” out of sight.

4. That the term *creed*, as used in the writings of the fathers, does not mean what the term means now — an accredited, permanent, written document, — but the **DOCTRINE** as opposed to a **FORM**.

5. That the creed, as the term was used, was “imprinted on the mind” — “was not written on paper, or with ink, but was engraved on the fleshly tables of the heart.” **AFTERWARDS**, and as a mere aid to memory, certain forms were compiled, but by whom no one can tell.

6. There seem to have been certain *churches* — **THREE** the author adduces from Ruffinus, and doubts not that there were many others — who had written formularies. When they first compiled these instruments, or who was their author, he appears not to know. It was the general habit among the bishops, for each one to instruct his own flock, and to resist error by the scriptures and by tradition. So that these **creeds**, even when found in churches, at a late period (afterwards) were mere assistants to memory, and

not instruments of ecclesiastical power. — But to this point I may have occasion to return again.

Sir Peter King, an episcopalian, in his inquiry into the constitution of the primitive church, after having collected and studied, all the ancient creeds — “whole creeds and pieces of creeds,” — which he had met with in the first three centuries, remarks,

“And here, since we have mentioned the SYMBOL, it will be no unuseful digression to inquire a little into the ancient creeds; for as for that creed which is commonly called the apostles’, all learned persons are now agreed, that it was never composed by them, neither do I find it within my prescribed time.* But though they had not that, yet they had other creeds very like thereunto, which contained the fundamental articles of the Christian faith, unto which all Christians gave their assent and consent, and that publicly at baptism, whence, as before, it is called by Cyprian, *the law of the symbol*, and by Novation, *the rule of truth*.

“This creed was handed down from father to son, as a brief summary of the necessary scripture truths, not *in ipsissimis verbis*, or in the same set words, but only the sense or substance thereof; which is evident, from hence, that we *never find the creed twice repeated in the same words, no, not by one and the same father.*”†

I remark here, 1. That his lordship has not furnished us with any established, or regular, “form of sound words;” but those forms which change and vary under the pen of the same father. 2. He agrees with Mosheim and Du Pin as to the “apostles’ creed:”

* The first three centuries. † Part II. p. 57.

he finds it not in the first three centuries. 3. He adduces Cyprian as a witness, whose authority, as Dr. M. has shown, Augustine set aside with so much gracefulness and urbanity. He also quotes from Novation the phrase — “Rule of truth,” which I take to be equivalent with — “Rule of faith,” and which Du Pin has saved me the trouble of explaining. Some of his instances or examples of these ancient creeds, shall be noticed hereafter.

4. He has quoted from Cyprian the phrase — “Law of the symbol,” as a synonyme with CREED. I shall avail myself of the opportunity thus presented to inquire after the meaning of the term SYMBOL, used in this connexion, and may thereby be able to explain the case of those *church creeds*, to which Du Pin seems to allude. This inquiry may help us to discover the earliest appearance of *creeds*, as superadded to the bible, and thence to follow them to the Council of Nice, where they were first enacted into permanent ordinances, or converted into instruments of ecclesiastical power, — the form in which they are most interesting as subjects of the present discussion.

Mosheim, in his “commentaries on the affairs of Christians before the time of Constantine the Great,” and in his views of the *second* century, informs us that — “The multitude professing Christianity were divided into the PROFANE, or those who were not as yet admitted to the MYSTERIES, and the INITIATED, or FAITHFUL and PERFECT. — The latter were properly termed THE CHURCH. — It became, moreover, customary, even in this century, more especially in Egypt and the neighbouring provinces, for persons desirous of being admitted into either of these classes, to be

previously exercised and examined, we may even say tormented, for a great length of time, with a variety of ceremonies, for the most part nearly allied to those that were observed in preparing people for *a sight of the heathen mysteries*. Upon the same principle, a two-fold form was given to divine worship, the one general and open to the people at large, the other special and concealed from all, except the faithful or initiated. To the latter belonged the common prayers, baptism, the *agapæ* or love feasts, and the Lord's supper; and as none were permitted to be present at these "mysteries," as they were termed, save those whose admission into the fellowship of the church was perfect and complete, so likewise was it expected that, as a matter of duty, the most sacred silence should be observed in regard to every thing connected with the celebration of them, and nothing whatever relating thereto be committed to the ears of the profane. From this constitution of things it came to pass, not only that many terms and phrases made use of in *the heathen mysteries* were transferred and applied to different parts of the Christian worship, particularly to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, but that, in not a few instances the sacred rites of the church were contaminated by the introduction of various pagan forms and ceremonies."

To the foregoing the learned author appends the following note: — "Instances in *abundance*, of terms and phrases applied after this manner, are to be found in Clement of Alexandria *alone*, who seems, as it were, to pride himself in placing the rites of Christianity on a parallel with the *heathen mysteries*, and in applying to the former certain terms and modes of expression de-

duced from the latter. Possibly we may not do wrong in referring to this source the application of the term **SYMBOLUM** to those professions of faith which were made use of to distinguish Christians from the rest of the world. **THE SIGNS OR WATCH-WORDS** communicated to those who were admissible to the mysteries, in proof of their fraternization, and that they might be readily distinguished from impostors, were, *it is well known*, termed **SYMBOLA**. The oriental Christians, also, of this age, were accustomed to compare baptism with that lustration with which it was the practice to consecrate, in a certain degree, those who were about to be initiated in the mysteries; and the profession of faith, delivered at the font, with *the watch-word or sign* communicated to the candidates for admission to the *secret* rites of heathenism; on which account it was usual for this profession of faith, to be solemnly delivered in the very act of baptism to every one admitted into the church. Indeed, in its operation, the profession of faith, to which we allude, was by no means dissimilar to the sign of mystical initiation among the heathen. For as, by means of the latter, those, who had been admitted to a participation of the mysteries, were to be distinguished from the profane, so likewise, did that **SUM** of the Christian religion, which newly baptized persons received at the font, serve as a mark whereby to know the true faithful, not only from heathen worshippers, but also from the catechumens. To any one allowing to this a due measure of attention, I think it will not appear improbable, that the term **SYMBOL** was one of those things that were adopted by the Christians from the discipline of the heathen mysteries. Nothing certainly is more com-

mon than for two things, having several points of resemblance, to come in the course of time to be distinguished by one and the same title ?”*

The work, from which the above extract is copied, I had not seen, when the “Remarks” were published. It sufficiently explains the incipient character, of the early creeds, and the circumstances to which they are to be ascribed; — the creeds of *churches* of which Du Pin speaks, — “the law of the symbol,” about which Cyprian writes, — and the treatise of Ruffinus de Symbola, subjoined to Cyprian’s works. My general impressions in reference to the Council of Nice remain unaltered, as I shall hereafter evince. A goodly origin of creeds, truly, to which their advocates in the nineteenth century refer the church! The abandonment of the law of charity, in order to copy the model of a heathen fraternity! The duty of letting our light shine before the world, exchanged for the sign and watch-word of concealed mysteries!

Before this extract is dismissed, the reader may turn to it again, and learn — the origin of the popular difference between CHURCH and CONGREGATION, and lay the fact alongside of the argument with which I closed the preceding chapter: — the origin of the superstitious regard in which the Lord’s supper and baptism are held, — the origin of tokens of admission to the Lord’s table, and tickets of admission to love-feasts; — the origin of a common practice of dismissing the *congregation*, when the *church* is about to commemorate the Lord’s death; and possibly the origin of an equally reprehensible custom, *i. e.* conventions

* Vol. II. pp. 185. ’7.

“sitting with closed doors.” Had the memorial of the Lord’s resurrection, the sabbath-day, been treated in like manner, the whole community might now be a brotherhood of heathens. But they have respected as much of Christianity as has been left to them.

Proceeding in the order of quotations, already pursued, I turn again to Du Pin.* He remarks — “The etymology of the word *symbol* is yet more uncertain; for some affirm, that the *creed* is so called, because it is, as it were, the distinguishing mark and character of Christians; others, because it was composed of the sentences of different persons; and lastly, others, on the account of its being made in a general conference.” He alludes to the apostles’ creed, his opinions of which have been previously given. In a note, he adds — “The Greek word *sumbolon* properly signifies a *note* — *sign* — or *mark*; therefore the mystical signs and notes of Pythagoras were called *sumbola puthagorika*. Herodian uses the word to denote a military signal. Other authors, as Dion Cassius and Suetonius, apply it to signify signs or marks, and certain *tickets* that were given to those that were admitted to certain shows, and for the distribution of largesses. Some say that the word *symbolum* among the Latins signifies an entertainment, where every one pays his club, or even the club itself; but this does not belong to the neuter *symbolum*, but to the feminine *symbola*, and in Greek *sumbola*, as may be seen in Aristophanes’ scholiast, in Athenæus and Plutarch; therefore it ought to be read in Terence’s *Andria*, *symbolam dedit*, and not *symbolum*. Aulus Gellius makes use of the word

* His large work I did not possess at the time the “Remarks” were published:

symbola to signify one man's share in a reckoning ; and declares that this term was also attributed to those questions that were expounded by Taurus the philosopher, in the presence of divers persons. St. Cyprian (in the *third* century) is the first that applied the word *symbol* to denote an epitome or abridgement of the Christian faith. Optatus (in the *fourth* century) calls the heretics, the deserters of the true *symbol*, alluding to a military signal. And, to the same effect, St. Chrysologus declares, that the *symbol* is the covenant we make with God in baptism.* The reader could scarcely have suspected, that this inquiry into the origin of creeds, would furnish him with a consecrated pagan RELICT, instead of a DIVINE WARRANT.

King gives much the same explanation of the term *symbol*, in his history of the Apostles' creed. It is not, however, necessary to waste either time or space in transcribing any extracts from his works. It will be more profitable to furnish some samples of the early creeds, to which he, and Dr. M. refer. The reader will then be better able to judge for himself. Cyprian's creed has already been disposed of. Tertulian has penned *three* different creeds in three several places. Origen has given *two*. St. Irenæus has also given *two* ; and one of these I shall now copy out. It is as follows :

“The church, although scattered over the whole world, even to the extremities of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples the FAITH, viz. on one God the Father, Almighty, that made the heaven and the earth, and the seas, and all things therein

* Art. Apos. Creed.

—and on one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation — and on the Holy Spirit, who, by the prophets, preached the dispensations, and the advents, and the generation from a virgin; and the suffering, and the resurrection from the dead, and the assumption, in flesh, into heaven, of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ; and his coming again from the heavens in the glory of the Father, to sum up all things, and raise all flesh of all mankind; that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the good pleasure of his Father, who is invisible, every knee may bow, of beings in heaven, in earth, and under the earth; and every tongue may confess to him; and that he may exercise righteous judgment upon all; may send spiritual wickednesses, and transgressing and apostate angels, and ungodly and unjust, and lawless, and blasphemous men, into eternal fire. But on the righteous and holy — on those who have kept his commandments, and continued in his love, whether from the beginning, or after repentance, may, with the gift of life, bestow incorruption, and put them in possession of eternal glory.”*

The intelligent reader may very readily suppose, that all this could have been written by one of the early fathers, without any intention of declaring any thing more than those essential principles of the gospel, which, like the sun, shine every where, and enlighten all men who are willing to come to the knowledge of the truth. The extract has not the *form* of a creed, or of one of those floating *symbols*, of which

* Mason's Plea, pp. 39, 40.

so much more than is either profitable or necessary has been so often written. Dr. Mason, from whose pages I quote, remarks concerning it — “It is clear that this venerable father did not mean to give the very words of *any formula of faith* ; but to state, substantially, those high and leading truths in which all the churches of Christ over the whole world harmonized, and which formed the doctrinal bond of their union.”

The second example of an early creed, which I shall furnish, is from the closet of Gregory Thaumaturgus. Dr. Miller has quoted it in his letters on unitarianism. It may be found, also, in Cave’s lives of the fathers, and Du Pin’s history. It is among those enumerated by King, and Dr. Mosheim refers to it as “a brief summary of the Christian religion.” It is as follows : — “There is one God, the Father of the living Word, of the subsisting wisdom and power, and of Him who is his eternal image ; the perfect begotten of him that is perfect, the Father of the only begotten Son. There is one Lord, the Only of the Only, God of God, the character and image of the godhead ; the powerful Word, the comprehensive Wisdom, by which all things were made, and the power that gave being to the whole creation : the true Son of the true Father ; the Invisible of the Invisible ; the Incorruptible of the Incorruptible ; the Immortal of the Immortal ; and the Eternal of Him that is Eternal. There is one Holy Ghost, having its subsistence of God, which appeared through the Son to mankind ; the perfect Image of the perfect Son ; the life-giving Life ; the holy Fountain ; the Sanctity and the Author of sanctification ; by whom God the Father is made manifest ; who is over

all and in all ; and God the Son who is through all. A PERFECT TRINITY, which neither in glory, eternity, nor wisdom, is divided or separated from itself."

The foregoing has been denominated, "the celebrated confession of faith of Gregory Thaumaturgus." The circumstance, which especially entitles it to notoriety, deserves to be made known. I shall take the account of it from Dr. Cave's biographic sketch of the bishop. It seems that Gregory was called to fulfil the duties of a particular position, to which he was incompetent. Heresies, grievous and perplexing, had spread themselves over the countries, where the scene of his episcopal labors had been laid out. He himself was "altogether unexercised in theological studies, and the mysteries of religion." By what "test of orthodoxy" he had been admitted into the ministry, we are not told. Perhaps there was none but the bible, or some trivial "symbols," which had not yet attained that eminence. But, under his difficulty, and "for remedy thereof, he is said to have immediate assistance from heaven. For while one night he was deeply considering of these things, and discussing matters of faith in his own mind, he had a vision, wherein two august and venerable persons, whom he understood to be St. John the Evangelist, and the blessed Virgin, appeared in the chamber where he was, and discoursed before him concerning those points of faith, which he had before been debating with himself. After whose departure, he immediately penned that canon and rule of faith which they had declared, and which he ever after made the standard of his doctrine, and bequeathed as an inestimable legacy and depositum to his successors."

Such pretensions are really trying one's credulity and gravity too far. I shall let them pass, along with "the heathen mysteries," of which the "symbols" were no very distant imitation, for as much as the reader may think them worth. If he admires them, I shall not object; and if he promptly rejects them, he will do no more, than in justice to his own understanding, I should suppose he would do. The world has grown too old to be convinced by such arguments; and our own good sense would throw off, as unworthy of our confidence, any ecclesiastical arrangements that may be traced to so equivalent an origin. — Alas! are these the arguments by which, even reputable and literary, theologians expect to sustain their tottering cause? Will protestant ministers keep heathen and popish shades, — the puppets of ignorance and superstition — flitting around them? as the good genii of their moral enterprise, when they are combining to give the WORLD the BIBLE?

CHAPTER VII.

Subject Continued — Ecclesiastical Power.

IT is manifest to every reflecting mind, that CREEDS, as instruments of ecclesiastical power, could not be brought into the church, until the POWER that framed them, or should have an acknowledged right to enact them, should exist. The Council of Nice framed a creed. So did other councils about the same period. Synods and Assemblies have in later ages imitated their example. No individual bishop, no single fa-

ther, had any right to control the public conscience. The bishop of Rome never has been, and never will be, able to reconcile the world to his mighty arrogance. It is utterly in vain then to quote from any one father, or from many fathers, the creeds, which those, who are fond of ecclesiastical antiquities, may have found in their writings. The inquiry, which the present discussion prompts and urges, must be pursued in another direction. The origin of delegated bodies must be ascertained, and their history carefully traced. Their pretensions must be weighed, and their doings brought up "to the law and the testimony."

It would seem, taking the scriptures and the early ages of the church as guides, that the PEOPLE originally had much to do with the government of the church. They elected officers, they cast out apostates, and were consulted in matters of general interest. It can hardly be supposed that they would forge fetters of slavery for themselves. The sovereignty of the PEOPLE is now-a-days thought to be the guaranty of liberty. There is nothing which despots fear more than the illumination and action of the public mind. As the gospel professedly brings *light* into the world, proclaims its glad tidings to all people, and aims at general virtue, it must necessarily be a *popular* institute. Its popular character, which is so evidently displayed in its ministerial offices and its common ordinances, is one of the strongest and most vivid proofs of its divine origin. Systems of philosophy may be awarded to some aristocracy, but the gospel is preached to the POOR. Its officers were originally chosen from among the PEOPLE; and ever

since any one of the PEOPLE, virtuous and gifted, who desired to be a bishop, has found no impassable barrier to the accomplishment of his wishes. The church has been called upon to pray to "the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into the harvest;" and has been thereby admonished that the ministerial office has been appropriated to no FAMILY SUCCESSION, as under the former economy. While the people attend to their own rights, and do not thoughtlessly yield them up to delegates, their liberties are safe. But when they sink into supineness; are not careful to possess intelligence enough to understand their own privileges; forget that the Spirit of God has been promised to them, and leave to others to do what they should do for themselves, there is no knowing what may follow. The bible may be taken from them; a creed may be substituted, and popes may glory both in their wealth and their tears. The Son of God gave to the world a law of liberty and the rights of freemen. His apostles besought the church never to surrender a gift so precious, but to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had set her free." Had her sons obeyed, in vain should the antiquarian have searched for ecclesiastical creeds among enlightened and sanctified men. But every body knows what has taken place. Even now the PEOPLE seem to imagine that they have nothing to do in the church, save to hear a minister preach, and give some pittance in return for common-place sentences. Who can now persuade them to believe, that they owe allegiance to none but their Master in heaven? and that his law is their rule?

Possibly it may be asked, whether there is not to be

some government in the church? Most assuredly. There is the government of the PEOPLE, of which Christ's own law is the rule. And are there no officers? Certainly; but their great characteristic is WORK, not government. They are "helpers" of the people's joy, not lords over their faith. He who desires to be great, must become a *servant*; must humble himself as his master, to sympathize with, not to rule over, a sinful and suffering world. Canons and creeds for the management of the human family, accurate and profound and liberal enough to be transmitted from generation to generation, all the combined wisdom of ministerial men cannot produce. Moses learned the law on the burning mount—God spake to him mouth to mouth. The prophets were inspired men, inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost. And apostles delivered, in sound words, what they received from the Lord. After them, bishops and councils and popes, in framing canons and perpetuating traditions, have done nothing but commit mistakes, enslave the human mind, and mock the world with the mighty pretence of infallibility.

The idea has been often advanced, that the Son of God has given no form of government to his church. And somewhere hereabout the long protracted controversies, involving popery, episcopacy, presbyterianism, independency, methodism, and whatever other political distinction may belong to the subject, are about to be wound up. No new sect can arise, or live long; for when society seems to be dissolving, and the different parties grow nerveless and paralytic under revolution, who will undertake, with any hope of success, to organize another series of divisions.

But this is not the direction of argument which they take, who have advanced the idea adverted to. They infer that a religious community may adopt any form of ecclesiastical government, which may appear most *expedient*, the Master having left the whole subject open to the prescriptions of human wisdom, and the lights of human experience. Their conclusion, however, is a complete nonsequitur. If the legislator has not made certain laws, it might rather follow that those laws are not necessary, and that things had much better be left to themselves. To reason otherwise, argues the incompetency of the legislator; or, that a confidence has been reposed in the perfection of human wisdom, which has uniformly been disappointed. The reign of councils and creeds has been a reign of ignorance, immorality and contention. Solomon said — “So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was **POWER**, but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they who hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.”

When one considers the nature of Christianity, — that its advocates should be enlightened, virtuous, benevolent and liberal free-men, walking in fellowship with Jehovah, and in good feeling with one another, and guided by the Spirit to live on the anticipations of future glory — he might well ask, how much government can be needed? And when he reflects that the executive officers who are put in commission, are

amply qualified to sustain the few and simple formalities of religion, and that express provision has been made for the ejection of reprobates, while the perpetuity of the institution is secured, he will find it difficult to assign any reason for a more extended legislation, except it shall be for mere "pomp and circumstance," or, for power and oppression. Such a *community* as Christianity proposes will act from *principle*, not from *fear*. The vigour of personal conscience makes them efficient and active ; and the consciousness of their moral relations and their glorious destinies teaches them self-respect. And such *officers* are above the impulse of earthly ambition. They are honourable and heavenly men, in whom their race may confide, and whom old and young may love. They aspire after neither wealth, nor titles, nor power. They are the servants of the King of saints, and his providence is the guardianship under which they

Allure to brighter worlds and lead the way.

If this will not satisfy, then let me ask — when Jehovah himself has given law which covers all the duties, trials, and relations of human life ; when he has established competent means for the promulgation of that law "to every creature ;" when he promises to superintend its operations, and when he recognises civil government as his own ordinance, whose institutions will necessarily grow pure and simple as the gospel enlightens mankind, what more can ecclesiastics desire ? They dream. Fancy leads where wisdom should guide. Every step they take makes it necessary they should take another. Uniformity is lost never to be recovered ; and the church forgets that the dispensation, under which she lives, is "the kingdom

of God." The multiplied ceremonies of a formal theocracy have been removed, and the intellectual, or spiritual, dominion of the Holy Ghost escapes observation. Every community impresses on its sectarian institutions its own character, and an issue occurs, which every intelligent mind may deprecate, and which Gibbon happily sketched, when he said — "In the profession of Christianity, the variety of national characters may be clearly distinguished. The natives of Syria and Egypt abandoned their lives to lazy and contemplative devotion. Rome *again* aspired to the dominion of the world; and the wit of the lively and loquacious Greek was consumed in the disputes of metaphysical theology." Protestants have often remarked, that the catholic religion is very much modified by the country in which it is tolerated; and that it cannot do in America, what it unhesitatingly does in other lands. An American religion, it would seem, is not a mere fanciful conception, but is really something very desirable. I hope it may be as independent, as expansive, as liberal, as intellectual, and as simple, as a community of free-men could be expected to make it. It will then be CHRISTIANITY ITSELF.

Are there no ecclesiastical courts? Perhaps there may be; but I shrink from the abused term, and still more from the thing itself. It stands associated with so much historical tyranny and degradation, that any one, acquainted with the facts, might feel himself to quail under the recollection of them. Let us inquire.

Paul speaks of "the laying on the hands of the PRESBYTERY." — By a *presbytery* is to be understood, an association, or if the reader pleases, a bench, of

ELDERS. Such a court, if *court* it must be called, every Jewish synagogue acknowledged. Before the Jewish synagogue was established, such a court belonged to every *city*, and convened in its gates. It seems to have been constituted, in early times, not only among the descendants of Abraham, but among all the nations; and appears to have given form to the various governments that existed among mankind. A very simple, harmless thing — perfectly consistent with the most extended liberty, and with the most popular institutions, as well as perfectly rational in itself.

The apostles left the churches under this form of government; and it remained unaltered for some time. — “The churches,” says Mosheim, “in those early times, were *entirely independent*; none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each one governed by its own rulers and its own laws.” — “Most of the epistles of Ignatius,” says Dr. Miller, “are directed to *particular churches*; and in every case, we find *each church* furnished with a bishop, a *presbytery* and deacons.— In short, to every altar, or *communion table*, there was one *presbytery*, as well as one bishop.” — “*Every church*,” King says, “was at liberty to express the fundamental articles of the christian faith in that way and manner, which she saw fit *pro re nata*, or as occasion offered.” And again — “As in those churches where there were presbyters, both they and the bishop presided together, so also they ordained together, both laying on their hands in ordination, as Timothy was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the *presbytery*; *i. e.* by the hands of the bishop and presbyters, as is the constant signification of the word *presbytery* in all the writings of the ancients.” But it is not worth while to multiply quotations.

Having ascertained that there was a presbytery *in each church, or to every communion table* — not what is now-a-days called a PRESBYTERY — and that all these churches were independent of each other, it is evident that the **POWER** to make ecclesiastical creeds has not yet been discovered. Du Pin tells us that this enviable supremacy belonged to COUNCILS. “*Councils,*” he says, “are assemblies composed of bishops and priests, which are held to deliberate upon ecclesiastical affairs, *to make decisions about the true faith, to regulate the policy and manners of Christians,* or punish the blameworthy.” The preface to the Savoy confession, seems to utter most doleful complaints, because such councils had **not been countenanced** among those, with whom its framers were associated. — “Hitherto,” say they, “there have been no *associations* of our churches, no meetings of our ministers, to promote the common interest. Our churches are like so many ships launched singly, and sailing apart and alone in the vast ocean, in these tumultuous times, exposed to every wind of doctrine, under no other conduct than **THE WORD AND SPIRIT**; and our particular elders, and principal brethren, without associations among ourselves, or so much as holding out a common light to others, whereby they may know where we are.” — Individual and independent churches are not the framers of those ecclesiastical creeds, by which such mighty achievements are to be wrought. No one knows any thing about **THEM**. If they wish to have **POWER**, and make a display, they must **COMBINE**. — How would it look, if the different presbyteries, or even synods, belonging to the General Assembly, should begin to make a creed, each for itself?

and that, even though, one would think, notwithstanding the confession of faith, they “are carried about by every wind of doctrine,” and many a ship seems to be launched singly on the vast ocean. Every one knows how such a step would be estimated. The unity of the body would be considered to be destroyed, and the perpetrators of such a deed would be dealt with as highly criminal. Hence, notwithstanding the known diversity of doctrine, all hold fast to the confession of faith. How that can be consistently done, the reader must determine for himself.

I must then turn to inquire after the origin of COUNCILS. And in the outset I shall be met by the facts recorded in the acts of the apostles,* and the declaration that a *council* was held by the apostles at Jerusalem. The thing itself is not so stated in the record, as any one may discern by turning to the passage. The particulars of the case were as follows—Certain men had gone from Judea to Antioch, who were very diligent and zealous in teaching the brethren the necessity of circumcision. Paul and Barnabas resisted them in vain; in consequence of which it was determined to commission a deputation of inquiry to Jerusalem. The apostles, the elders, and *the whole church*, send an answer with certain chosen men, and say—“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words subverting your souls, saying, ye must be circumcised and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment, it seemed good unto us, *being assembled with one accord*, to send chosen men unto you, with

* Chap. xv.

our beloved Barnabas and Paul." There is not one single synodical formality, either in the use of terms or the exercise of authority. No one can make any thing more of it, than a mere reference to *the church of Jerusalem*, of a question, in which that particular church was specially interested. It would require a very active fancy to make any thing more of it.

"The churches founded by the apostles," Mosheim tells us, "had this particular deference shown them, that they were consulted in difficult and doubtful cases; yet they had no juridical authority, no sort of supremacy over the others, nor the least right to enact laws for them." Du Pin speaks of "the consent of the apostolical churches," and observes that the bishops "lived in great union together, and preserved a mutual correspondence by letters which they sent to one another;" though they "were all persuaded, that they received their office immediately from Jesus Christ, and that Providence had assigned to each of them a portion of the flock of the heavenly pastor to govern; in such a manner, however, that in an exigence or time of necessity, they were to relieve the wants of all churches." And King tells us that "Cyprian wrote to the church of Rome for advice. For, saith he,— 'Dearly beloved brother, both *common reason* and *love* require, that none of these things that are transacted here, should be kept from your knowledge, but that we should have your counsel about ecclesiastical administrations.'—In these, and in many other such like cases, which would be needless to enumerate, there was a *correspondence* between the particular churches of the universal one." The frequency of "letters of

communion," is all the additional explanation that can be required, in view of the reference to the church of Jerusalem.

If any shall obstinately adhere to the notion, that the question of circumcision, which was carried up to Jerusalem, was formally sent to a regularly convened synod, or council, while I feel no disposition to pursue the argument and prove a negative, I yet may call for the CREED then framed? Had not the council authority to form a creed? Was that authority intrusted to the apostles? or was it lodged with both conjointly? In any one of the three cases, where is the CREED? A council was convened — Apostles were there — the two could act conjointly. The question is as perplexing as that which involves the subject of infallibility in the church of Rome. Neither can be found. Surely no one will represent the decision sent down to Antioch to be a *creed*. It might possibly be called a *canon* — but no ecclesiastic would call it any thing more. What a fine opportunity the apostles let slip past them, to make that INDISPENSABLE, AND INVALUABLE THING YELEPED A CREED!

Councils did not arise in the church for some time after the apostles had closed their labours and gone to their rest. The strong sense of personal liberty with which they had inspired their disciples, and the habits of independence which resulted from the constitution of the churches, could not be destroyed very speedily; but must be assailed insidiously, and overcome gradually. The people at large would at first resist. When they were quelled, men of strong intellect, upright intentions, and firm purpose, must next be removed out of the way, and that would not be

a very easy task. But when the feeling of social and moral honour grew feeble, when the spirit of evangelic enterprize was lost, or, to use the language of one of the fathers, "when the blood of Christ was no longer warm in the veins of the disciples," then the deteriorating process commenced. Du Pin says,

"In the first three ages of the church, these assemblies were more rare, and less remarkable, than they were in the following centuries; as well because the continual persecutions of the emperors hindered the bishops from meeting freely and in public; as also because the tradition of the apostles being as yet fresh in men's memories, it was not supposed necessary to summon a council for the establishing of every truth, and condemnation of every error. Hence it is, that we don't find in any credible authors, that any councils were held to condemn the first heretics — The errors of these heretics were looked upon with horror by all the Christians; who considered the authors of them, and likewise those that maintained them, as persons already excommunicated; and separated from the church, without the solemnity and trouble of convening a synod to excommunicate them by name. In short, **EVERY BISHOP** instructed his own people in the true faith of the church, and confuted all sorts of errors by **THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION.**

"The first councils that are mentioned in antiquity are those that were held under the pontificate of Pope Victor, to adjust the celebrated controversy about keeping Easter; and some others that were assembled almost at the same time to suppress, the growing faction of the Montanists."

Mosheim informs us, that there “does not appear, in the first century, the smallest trace of that association of provincial churches, from which *councils* and metropolitans derive their origin. It was only in the *second* century that the custom of holding councils commenced in Greece, from whence it soon spread through the other provinces.”

Again, and referring to the second century, he says — “During a great part of this century, the Christian churches were entirely *independent* of each other; nor were they joined together by *association, confederacy*, or any other bonds but those of CHARITY. Each Christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws, which were either enacted, or, at least, approved by the society. But, in process of time, all the Christian churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times, in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks, with whom nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent states, and the regular assemblies which met, in consequence thereof, at fixed times, and were composed of the deputies of each respective state. But these ecclesiastical associations were not long confined to the Greeks; their great utility was no sooner perceived, than they became universal, and were formed in all places where the gospel had been planted. To these assemblies, in which the deputies, or commissioners of several churches consulted together, the name of *SYNODS* was appropriated by the Greeks, and that of *COUNCILS*, by the Latins; and the laws that were enacted, in these general meetings, were called *CANONS*, *i. e.* rules.

“ These councils, of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of this century, CHANGED the whole face of the church, and gave it A NEW FORM ; for by them the ancient privileges of the PEOPLE were considerably diminished, and the POWER and authority of the bishops greatly augmented. The humility, indeed, and prudence of these pious prelates prevented their assuming *all at once*, the POWER with which they were *afterwards* invested. At their *first* appearance in these general councils, they acknowledged that they were no more than the *delegates* of their respective churches, and that they acted in the name, and by the appointment of the PEOPLE: But they soon changed this humble tone, imperceptibly extended the limits of their AUTHORITY, turned their influence into DOMINION, and their councils into LAWS ; and openly asserted, at length, that CHRIST HAD EMPOWERED THEM TO PRESCRIBE TO HIS PEOPLE AUTHORITATIVE RULES OF FAITH AND MANNERS.

“ Another effect of these councils was, the gradual abolition of that perfect equality, which reigned among all bishops in the primitive times. For the order and decency of these assemblies required, that some one of the provincial bishops met in council, should be invested with a superior degree of POWER and authority ; and hence the rights of METROPOLITANS derive their origin. In the mean time the bounds of the church were enlarged ; the custom of holding councils was followed wherever the sound of the gospel had reached ; and the universal church had now the appearance of one vast republic, formed by a combination of a great number of little states. This occasioned the creation of a new order of ecclesiastics, who were appointed, in different parts of the world, as

heads of the church ; and whose office it was to preserve the consistence and union of that immense body, whose members were so widely dispersed throughout the nations. Such was the nature and office of the PATRIARCHS, among whom, at length, ambition, being arrived at its most insolent period, formed a new dignity, investing the bishop of Rome and his successors, with the title and authority of PRINCE OF THE PATRIARCHS."

Surely the community cannot be aware of these things, or they would not look with so much complacency on presbyteries, synods, conferences, conventions and assemblies. Can it be possible, that knowing these things, THE PEOPLE should be indifferent to the history of their own degradation? — But to proceed.

The late Dr. Wilson of Philadelphia, in his work on "the primitive government of Christian churches," remarks — "We learn from Tertullian, in the third century, that councils were collected in certain places throughout the Greek cities, from all the churches, by which the higher matters were managed in common, and the representation itself of the whole Christian persuasion, was regarded with high respect. Because, when synods were introduced, the churches were represented by delegates; and as this was among the Greeks only, it has been conjectured that they took the idea from their own civil forms. The practice was certainly founded on common consent, since they were neither at first of appellative jurisdiction, nor founded on scriptural authority.— Cyprian did not neglect to avail himself of means, so well adapted to enhance clerical influence and POWER, to which

he was so much inclined. In Africa, therefore, they soon became frequent; and their members, gradually losing sight of the representation of their churches, considered themselves as acting by virtue of their offices."

I have thus traced the rise of ecclesiastical **POWER**; and have shown it to have constructed its claims upon the despoiled privileges of individual conscience, which are the rights of man. I have pointed out its gradual advances, while Christians became sluggish, and bishops grew ambitious; and shown the awful extreme of despotic sway to which it hastened in those first ages of Christianity, to which appeals are often made with more confidence than wisdom. The reader must have distinctly observed that retrograde movement in spiritual things, which degraded the church from the dignified simplicity of being under law to Christ; dressed her off in the meretricious attire of human institutions; and exchanged the glorious principles of the new covenant for the forbidding peculiarities of a human compact. He must have recognised in the altered form of the church, the unity of the church expounded as a *political* principle, instead of that pure, spiritual, ethereal subsistence, denominated "the unity of the Spirit." And he has reached the origin of those instruments of ecclesiastical **POWER** under consideration — those authoritative rules of faith and manners, which have so completely usurped the place of the bible, as tests of orthodoxy. It is just as I have said — "The priesthood being changed, there is of necessity a change also of the **LAW**." The bible, not recognising councils, nor the offices which they create, has made no legislative provision for either. And

hence it is, that there are such differences of opinion about the form of church government; while many suppose that the scriptures have prescribed no form at all, but have left it all to the changes of expediency.

The last quotation, from the pages of Mosheim's ecclesiastical history, covers the whole ground, which, in pursuing this discussion, I have to traverse, and is a little ahead of my argument. The COUNCILS, whose origin has been so distinctly traced, and whose pathway to eminence and power was over the rights of the PEOPLE; which completely changed the *popular* character of the church, as it had flourished under biblical influence, and which threw religion into the hands of a spiritual aristocracy; made CANONS, or rules, in abundance: but I have not discovered, so far as the opportunities of examination have been afforded, any CREED — or exhibition of “scriptural doctrines in regular order” — which any of them framed before the council of NICE. That instrument of ecclesiastical operation, was so perfectly monarchical in its spirit, that the church does not seem to have been prepared for it; until her members had been accustomed to “the pomp and circumstance” of royalty, displayed around her own altars: until some reigning despot should perceive the similitude to his own institutions, and, apprehending a rival in the person of an ecclesiastic, should avail himself of some occurring circumstance, to grasp the whole: and then a CREED came in, the offspring of a union between church and state, enacted and sustained by the signature of a political sovereign. I return again to the historian.

Mosheim, in his account of the *third* century, writes

—“ The face of things began to change in the Christian church. The ancient method of ecclesiastical government, seemed in general, still to subsist; while, at the same time, by imperceptible steps, it varied from the primitive rule, and degenerated towards the form of a *religious monarchy*. For the bishops aspired to higher degrees of POWER and authority than they had formerly possessed; and not only violated the rights of the PEOPLE, but also made gradual encroachments upon the privileges of the PRESBYTERS: And that they might cover these usurpations with an air of justice, and an appearance of reason, they published NEW DOCTRINES CONCERNING THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH and of the EPISCOPAL DIGNITY; which, however, were in general, so obscure, that they themselves seem to have understood them as little as those to whom they were delivered. One of the principal authors of this change, in the government of the church, was Cyprian, who pleaded for the power of the bishops with more zeal and vehemence, than had ever been hitherto employed in that cause, though not with an unshaken constancy and perseverance; for in difficult and perilous times, *necessity sometimes obliged him to yield, and to submit several things to THE JUDGMENT AND AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH.*”

Again — “ The bishops assumed, in many places, a PRINCELY AUTHORITY, particularly those who had the *greatest number* of churches under their inspection, and who presided over the most *opulent* assemblies. They appropriated to their evangelical function the *splendid ensigns* of temporal majesty. A THRONE, surrounded with ministers, exalted above his equals the servant of the meek and humble Jesus; and *sump-*

tuous garments dazzled the eyes and minds of the multitude into an ignorant veneration for their arrogant authority. The example of bishops was ambitiously imitated by the presbyters; who, neglecting the sacred duties of their station, abandoned themselves to the indolence and delicacy of an effeminate and luxurious life. The deacons, beholding the presbyters deserting thus their functions, boldly usurped their rights and privileges; and the effects of a CORRUPT AMBITION, were spread through every rank of the sacred order."

So much for the third CENTURY. In the FOURTH appeared CONSTANTINE THE GREAT. A circumstance occurred, inviting his attention to, and his interference with, ecclesiastical matters, which reminds one of the visit paid to Gregory Thaumaturgus, by "the apostle John and the blessed Virgin," when he formed his celebrated confession of faith. A miraculous CROSS was seen in the air. This was enough. Constantine was converted, and, to the universal joy of Christians, became the PATRON of the church. But this new ecclesiastical HEAD, was very far from leading a religious life, or glorying in the cross of the Lord Jesus; and, instead of breaking up the dominion over the human conscience, which had been established by the ambitious EPISCOPACY, and subservient COUNCILS, he confirmed and extended it, appropriating to himself the pre-eminence. "Though he permitted the church to remain a body politic, distinct from that of the state, as it had formerly been, yet he assumed to himself the supreme power over this sacred body, and the right of modelling and governing it in such a manner, as should be most conducive to THE PUBLIC

GOOD. This right he enjoyed without any opposition, as none of the bishops presumed to call his authority in question."

At this juncture, and under these circumstances, Constantine called together the Synod, or Council, of NICE. It was denominated "ŒCUMENICAL," *i. e.* a council of the whole world, or the whole earth, because it was called together from all parts of the Roman empire, to which the title of the world, or the earth, was given." It was summoned in 325, and was composed of 318 bishops. In this assembly the disputes between Alexander and Arius, on the subject of the trinity, among other matters on which it was thought proper the council should legislate for the peace of the church, was to be adjusted by the exercise of ABSOLUTE POWER. The historian reports, that "after many *keen* debates, and *violent* efforts of the two parties, the doctrine of Arius was condemned; Christ was declared consubstantial, or of the same essence, with the Father; the vanquished presbyter *banished* among the Illyrians; and his followers COMPELLED to give their assent to the CREED OR CONFESSION OF FAITH, which was composed by this council." — Reader behold the ORIGIN of creeds as instruments of ecclesiastical POWER! Composed by the first *œcumenical council*, which was headed by an EMPEROR, the avowed champion of the SIGN of the CROSS, "whose authority no bishop presumed to call in question." See the ministers of Christ, humbled at the footstool of an earthly prince, and COMPELLED to SUBSCRIBE "the exhibition of scriptural doctrines in regular order," of whose ORTHODOXY his signature was the guaranty. If any reader will still advocate this

mighty system of mischief and imposition, he may at least forbear with one who can even indignantly rebel. — But it is no matter of wonder that the mind which can submit to all this should be easily alarmed by the cry of HERESY. He who is so far degraded may be alarmed at any thing. It would require all the implements of inquisitorial misrule to support his courage, or LIBERTY is a mere word.

But I must draw another parallel, inside of that which has just been completed. It is indispensably necessary, that the individual, who wishes to be accurately informed on the general subject, should take another view of the whole matter, and look at the history of THEOLOGY, as well as at that of POWER. If the reader is pleased so to do, he may follow me to the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

Subject Continued — Scholastic Theology.

IF the historical abstract, contained in the preceding chapter, be true, what can be said for the THEOLOGY of those times? Under the new dispensation, as the Redeemer and his disciples testify, mysteries were revealed, uncovered, explained, or made known. But it has been shown, that, in imitation of pagan folly, MYSTERIES were again introduced; and as handed down to the present day, they render the study of the bible a very difficult matter even now. “Shadows and clouds and darkness rest” on moral science, as though “the light of the world” had not appeared:

while superstition, and awe, and ignorance are every where betrayed, as though Jehovah had not given to his people "the Spirit of love, of power, and of a sound mind."

Then again, what can be said for the THEOLOGY of the times, in which ministerial men aspired after, and successfully grasped at, a lordship over the human conscience? and when the people succumbed to and were degraded by, such a despotic sway? "Religion had preserved its native purity, as long as the celestial oracles were the only rule of faith;" but now "their decisions were either neglected, or postponed to the inventions of men;" and how could it be otherwise, than that religion should "degenerate from its primitive and divine simplicity?" Can either despots or slaves comprehend and maintain right *principles*? If "out of the heart are the issues of life," and if men are to be "known by their fruits," can there be any confidence in the moral systems which are to be traced back to such expositors? to an age, when, to use the language of another, "there was NO PEOPLE?" And shall those systems be the model for large, varied, and liberal thought now, when the fetters of despotism have been broken, and the PEOPLE are again appearing to claim their rights? If the gospel be a *popular* institute, and the ministry of reconciliation be a *popular* office—if, as now-a-days we are taught, while no one can reasonably doubt the maxim, intelligence, virtue, and liberty go hand in hand,—if conscience, enlightened, vigorous and active, be the real glory of a human being, or if to have the kingdom of God set up in each heart be the source of all moral efficiency, verily that must have been, from the very nature of the

case, a most wretched condition of moral science, in which the episcopacy, the union of church and state, creeds and popery arose.—It will be well for the reader carefully to ascertain, whether that theology, thus introduced, be not that very thing, which, at this hour, is called ORTHODOXY? and whether it can deserve such a high-sounding appellative? What intelligent mind could possibly confide in the terms or measures derived from a system, thus originating?

My remarks are intended to include the speculations of Arius, as well as those of Alexander:—What is popularly called unitarianism, as well as what is popularly called trinitarianism. When the controversy on the great topic now alluded to, or the dispute about *homoousios*, and *homoiousios*, arose, and when different councils determined different ways, how can any confidence be reposed on either side? Yet even now, as though theological science had not emerged from the darkness which then enveloped both the ministerial and the Christian mind, no one can abandon either side, without being accused of going to the other. We are not even permitted to go back to the scriptures, and judge for ourselves, without incurring an ecclesiastical suit for heresy.

If the historical sketch should be extended through subsequent centuries, when the things, already stated, worked out their legitimate consequences, we shall see that the bible entirely disappeared. All the fearful details of popery were introduced, and the dark ages came on. If we go on until the times of the reformation, even then a multitude of fragments were brought from the old schools,—mysteries were perpetuated, — Calvin taught over again the dogmas of Au-

gustine, — confessions of faith superseded, or were associated with, ancient creeds — protestant councils were substituted for popish councils — that beautiful, pompous, and lordly episcopacy was brought in, which has blended together in one harmonious system, as lord Chatham said, “a popish liturgy, calvinistic articles, and an arminian clergy” — as also that highly eulogized confession of the Westminster assembly, which its own members refused to SUBSCRIBE; and in which the reader may find propositions as long, as profound, as abstruse, and as metaphysical, as any human conscience can bear; and about whose import, — it is no matter of wonder, — its own SUBSCRIBERS in the present day disagree. Such has been the condition of theological science. Such it is now. And must the church of Christ, with his own bible in her hand, forever live thus? — trinitarians and unitarians, calvinists and arminians, episcopalians and presbyterians, methodists and baptists, catholics and protestants, still engaged in deadly strife?

Suppose that politicians, in erecting new forms of government, in which despots shall hold no trust, and where the PEOPLE shall be sovereign, should be referred back to olden times of ignorance and slavery, for orthodox political DOCTRINES — what would they say? Suppose that literary men, turning away from the wretched systems of the age, in which Galileo suffered for heresy, and who, rising from his knees after recantation, in the consciousness of truth whispered to his friend — “it does move though” — suppose that such men, while extensively engaged in investigating the works of God, which, like the bible, have been

intended for **ALL**, should be remanded to the literature of those distant ages, what would they say? But ecclesiastics and theologians may do this very thing; and the earnest, but independent, inquirer after biblical truth, has no popular sympathy to cheer, nor ministerial companionship, to sustain him. He lives abused, or unheeded and alone, with nothing to support him but the truth, and scarcely a ministerial companion except his Master. Even the Savoy complainants would not sympathize with him. It is to be hoped, however, that the hour of forced recantation is gone by; and that, in more than secret whisperings to some timid friend, **TRUTH** will be told.

But leaving an *a priori* argument, I turn to look after the facts. Dr. Mosheim relates, that during the *first* century — “The method of teaching the sacred doctrines of religion, was most *simple*, far removed from all the subtile rules of philosophy, and all the precepts of human art:” that — “**ALL** who professed firmly to believe that Jesus was the only Redeemer of the world; and who, in consequence of this profession, promised to live in a manner conformable to the purity of his holy religion, were immediately received among the disciples of Christ. This was all the preparation for baptism then required, and a more accurate instruction in the doctrines of Christianity was to be administered to them, after their receiving that sacrament.” — “The Christians took all possible care to accustom their children to the study of the **SCRIPTURES**, and to instruct them in the doctrines of their holy religion; and schools were every where erected for this purpose, even from the very commencement of the Christian church.”

“After some little while, it was judged **EXPEDIENT** to divide the multitude into two orders or classes, viz : that of the *faithful*, and that of the *catechumens*. Of these, the former were such as had been solemnly admitted members of the church by the sacrament of baptism, and publicly pledged themselves to God and the brethren, that they would strictly conform themselves to the laws of the community; and who, in consequence thereof, possessed *the right of voting* in the public assemblies, and of being present at, and taking a share in, every part of divine worship.— The latter were those converts who, not having gone through the course of preparatory discipline and probation prescribed by the rules of the church, remained as yet unbaptized, and whose title to the rights of Christian fellowship was consequently deemed incomplete. These were not permitted to be present at the solemn assemblies of the church, or to join in the public worship; neither were they suffered to participate of the Lord’s supper.”

On these extracts a remark or two may not be out of place. — 1. There was not then that very great difficulty, in the way of individuals who were desirous of attaching themselves to the church, which has been oft-times since experienced; and which, even in that early age, was soon brought in.

2. Children, like Timothy, were at first brought up to know the *scriptures*; no *catechisms*, any more than *creeds*, had then been formed. Parents instructed their own children, as did Lois and Eunice; but afterwards *schools* were established; and parents, having obtained other people to do what they themselves ought to have done, soon learned to neglect the task

of education, which should have given the greatest pleasure; and declined in that progress of personal improvement, which they always realize, who in teaching others teach themselves. It might have been anticipated that this new class of teachers, which the scriptures have not called for, would soon grow tired and indolent, and throw the burden of instruction off from themselves. If parents lose a becoming interest in their children, strangers cannot be expected to cherish such a feeling very long. God did not intend that the ministerial institution should supersede the parental relation. The absence of living circumstances, which would be the every day illustration of truth to the juvenile mind, and which would be spread out under the parent's eye, would call for some new mode of instruction. Hence *catechisms*—hence the habit of reciting from memory, instead of efficient moral instruction—and hence the parental idea at the present hour, that ministers should, by a series of regular catechetical exercises, teach all the children of their parish. Every thing is transferred to the *church*, as though all personal responsibility, as well as the natural relations, were to be merged in the new social institution. — This is an example of what ecclesiastics, in the present day, call *EXPEDIENCY*;—a mighty word which silences many a moral reasoner who is inquiring what is *right*! and many a young man who would act independently under the calls of providence, if he knew how.

3. The division of converts into two classes—the application of the term *FAITHFUL*, to one of these classes, which the scriptures use in reference, as well to infants as to adults—the shutting out the other

class from a right to vote, to join in public worship, or to be present at the solemn assemblies, as though they had no interest in the ordinances of their Saviour — can any one suppose that these things are based on scriptural principles? Is such government founded on accurate THEOLOGY? But, says the historian, such things were thought to be EXPEDIENT.

To proceed. In the *second* century — “The Christian system, as it was hitherto taught, preserved its native and beautiful simplicity, and was comprehended in a small number of articles. The public teachers inculcated no other doctrines, than those that are contained in what is commonly called, the apostles’ creed; and in the method of illustrating them, all vain subtleties, all mysterious researches, every thing that was beyond the reach of common capacities, were carefully avoided. This will by no means appear surprising to those who consider, that, at this time, there was not the least controversy about those capital doctrines of Christianity, which were afterwards so keenly debated in the church; and who reflect, that the bishops of these primitive times were, for the most part, *plain* and *illiterate* men, remarkable rather for their *piety* and *zeal*, than for their learning and eloquence.

“This venerable simplicity, was not, indeed, of a long duration; its beauty was gradually effaced by the laborious efforts of *human learning*, and the *dark subtleties of imaginary science*. Acute researches were employed upon several religious subjects, concerning which ingenious decisions were pronounced; and, what was worst of all, *several tenets of a chimerical philosophy were imprudently incorporated into the*

Christian system. This disadvantageous change, this unhappy alteration of the primitive simplicity of the Christian religion, was chiefly owing to two reasons; the one drawn from pride, and the other from a sort of necessity. The former was from the eagerness of certain *learned* men to bring about a *union* between the DOCTRINES of Christianity, and the OPINIONS of the philosophers; for they thought it a very fine accomplishment, to be able to express the precepts of Christ *in the language* of philosophers, civilians and rabbins. The other reason that contributed to alter the simplicity of the Christian religion, was the necessity of having recourse to *logical definitions and nice distinctions*, in order to confound the sophistical arguments which the infidel and the heretic employed; the one to overturn the Christian system, and the other to corrupt it."

In the *third* century appeared Origen, whom Mosheim eulogizes in the highest terms. But he enables his readers to form their own opinion of that celebrated theologian, by making the following statement:—"The principal *doctrines* of Christianity were now explained to the people in their native purity and simplicity, without any mixture of ABSTRACT reasonings, or subtile inventions; nor were the feeble minds of the multitude loaded with a great variety of precepts. But the Christian doctors, who had applied themselves to the study of letters and philosophy, soon abandoned the frequented paths, and struck out into the devious wilds of fancy. The Egyptians distinguished themselves in this *new method* of explaining truth. They looked upon it as a noble and glorious task to bring the *doctrines* of celestial wisdom into a certain

subjection to the precepts of their *philosophy*; and to make deep and profound researches into the intimate and hidden nature of those truths, which the divine Saviour had delivered to his disciples. ORIGEN was at the head of this speculative tribe. This great man, enchanted by the charms of the platonic philosophy, set it up as THE TEST OF ALL RELIGION.—From these teachers, the philosophic or SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY, as it is called, derived its origin, and proceeding thence, passed through various forms and modifications, according to the genius, turn, and erudition, of those who embraced it.” Behold, reader, the origin of TESTS—a test of ORTHODOXY. Like the early *symbols*, which have been shown to be mere pagan relics, so the introduction of the platonic philosophy into the Christian church, brought with it the doctrine of TESTS.—Another pagan shade flitting through the church!

Afterwards, when the church was passing through the changes and conflicts of the *fourth* century, “among all the religious controversies that divided the church, the most celebrated, both for their importance and their duration, were those relating to Origen and his doctrine.” He “was held, by the most part of Christians, in the highest veneration, and his name was so sacred as to give weight to the cause in which it appeared. The Arians, who were sagacious in searching for succours on all sides to maintain their sect, affirmed that he adopted their opinions.” The fact is much the same now, in reference to great men who have long since gone to their rest. Their opinions are matters of great controversy, and Arians are still liberal in their claim for succour from reputable names.

Du Pin gives a similar account of this great *theologian*. — “ We must distinguish in Origen what he says according to the way of speaking used by the church in his time, and what he says according to the principles of Plato’s philosophy; and then we need not wonder, if, after having acknowledged the truths of Christianity, he should lose himself by advancing such platonic notions as are destructive to them. And this, in my opinion, is the reason of his principal errors, which are all of them founded upon three principles taken from the platonic philosophy; which are, 1. That intelligent creatures have always been, and shall eternally exist. 2. That they have always been free to do good and evil. And, 3. That they have been precipitated into the lower places, and confined to bodies for a punishment of their sins. Let any one thoroughly examine all Origen’s errors of which we have just now spoken, and he will easily perceive that they all proceed from this, that he was willing to accommodate the truths of the Christian religion to these platonic principles.”

“He attributes very much to free-will, and nature; and he speaks but very little of grace, which he believes was infused into souls according to the merits which they have, before they are confined in bodies; and afterwards it is augmented according to the good and evil which they do in making use of their natural liberty. He ascribes, in several places, the conversion of a man, and all the good which he acts, to free-will, and allows hardly any thing to grace; so that it was not without reason that St. Hierom accuses him for having furnished the PELAGIANS with principles; though yet in some places he speaks very advantageously of grace, and of the assistance of God. He

is taxed for holding, that men may arrive at such a degree of perfection, that they shall be no more subject to temptation, nor commit any more sins : and indeed there are some relics of this error in his books. He has also affirmed, that those who have sinned, after having received the Holy Ghost, could obtain no more pardon for their sin. And upon this account, he maintains, that St. Peter had not as yet received the Holy Ghost, when he denied Christ ; and that being forsaken by God, it was impossible for him not to sin. When he explains that passage of the fifth chapter of the epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, he discourses of original sin after a very obscure manner, as if he doubted it. And we must not wonder after this, that he did not admit of any other predestination, than that which has respect to merits.”

I might furnish many more extracts of a similar kind. One, however, must suffice. — “ In his books we meet with many expressions which are very harsh, little conformable to the orthodox doctrine, and which seem to favour the Arians. He says, that the Word is an hypostasis different from the Father, and he takes the word hypostasis to signify *nature* and *substance*. He says likewise, that the Father and the Son are one in concord and in will ; and that the last is not properly God, but only called God, because he is the image and resemblance of the divinity ; that the Word and the Holy Ghost were made by the Father ; that we must not compare the Father with the Son ; and that the Father is greater than the Son, who is inferior to him, though he be superior to all creatures, as the sun-beam is inferior to the sun ; and lastly, that the Word is the minister of the Father. These ex-

pressions, and some others like them, are hard indeed ; but when there are contradictions in authors, we ought always, in my opinion, to take the most favorable side. Besides that it is more easy to put a good construction on these last expressions, WHICH WERE VERY COMMON BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF NICE, than to put a bad one upon the first, &c.”

These quotations have been made, that the reader may have some general idea of SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY,—of its character, its origin, and its progress. This mode of philosophizing so freely, and of bringing in pagan notions along with evangelical precepts, was, in connexion with that growing ecclesiastical power that has been described, ultimately the reason of calling the first œcumenical council—that of Nice. The ostensible reason, was a controversy between Alexander and Arius on the subject of the TRINITY :—a matter about which, from the view just given of Origen’s writings, who was celebrated as the greatest man of those times, there must have been considerable looseness and inaccuracy both in speaking and writing. The mere term TRINITY, which is not scriptural, Du Pin asserts was FIRST applied to the three persons of the godhead, by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, who was ordained in the year one hundred and seventy, or towards the close of the second century. A brief history of this controversy must now be drawn out. Some reader may, perhaps, very readily accuse me of unitarianism, popularly so called, as he goes over the extracts I have transcribed. But the detail is as much opposed to one view as the other ; for who could repose any confidence in the theology of those times ? whoever may have been its teachers ?

The circumstances, which have been detailed, required that the false philosophy, introduced by Origen, should be abandoned, and the bible be returned to the Christian church in its own purity, and as “a form of sound words,” or a crisis of fearful character would shortly occur. The elemental principles of moral government, which had been revealed, were grossly misunderstood by all parties. The manifestations, which Jehovah had made of HIMSELF, were interpreted on the false principles of the platonic philosophy, and the subject of TRINITY, which no man has ever been able to explain, was agitating all parties. Other matters of a similar character were equally troublesome. In such a case, when theologians cannot convince mankind by argument, they have no refuge but in FORCE. And all that was needed after the conversion of Constantine, was a fair occasion to act. That occasion was soon furnished — and furnished, as such occasions generally are, by those who are in POWER, and by their recklessly pushing matters too fast and too far.

“Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, leading a quiet and peaceable life, brought the church into an unity ; and on a certain time, in presence of the priests which were under him, and the rest of the clergy, he entreated somewhat more curiously of the holy trinity, and the unity to be in the trinity. Arius then being one of the priests placed in order under him, a man very skilful in the subtleties of sophistical logic, suspecting the bishop to have brought into the church the erroneous doctrine of Sabellius the Africk, and being kindled with the desire of contention, set himself opposite against Sabellius the Africk, and, as it seemed, di-

rectly against the allegations of the bishop. — When he had, with his strange kind of doctrine, concluded and laid down this position, he provoked many to reason hereof, so that of a small sparkle a great fire was kindled.”*

Here was speculation arrayed against speculation; the simplicity of scriptural instructions was exchanged for abstract reasonings and subtile inventions; great and learned men were arguing about things which all had misunderstood and misrepresented; and the whole church was involved in grievous and unprofitable controversy; which, notwithstanding the high pretensions and the synodical proceedings of the orthodox — both papal and protestant — have not been settled to this day.

Constantine, according to Eusebius, was grievously afflicted — “as much as if he had fallen into some great calamity,” — when “a report was brought to him of a great faction which was growing up in the church.” He accordingly “bethought himself how he should prevent it;” but never, it would seem, had he considered, that, even if he had any legitimate power to interfere, he had better let it alone. “Straight he chooses one of those religious men which he had about him, who had been a faithful and zealous confessor of the truth in the times of persecution: him he sends to draw the Alexandrians to peace and concord, and by him sends letters written to that effect to the authors of the sedition.” — “This faithful messenger, did not only deliver his letters, but also dealt very earnestly with them in the emperor’s behalf, that

* Socrates’ Ecc. His. Lib. 1. ch. 3.

he might effect his desire. And though he was a very godly man, yet his letters or his endeavours could not bring matters to any good success, in regard that this faction grew stronger, and had overspread all the eastern provinces. And thus, through the malice of the devil, who envieth the happiness of the church, discord and contention continued.”

The emperor was disappointed and troubled, because his efforts were unsuccessful. “Whereupon he levied, as it were, an army of God’s servants, and called a general council, and writ letters to the bishops, to summon them to repair to this convention, or spiritual parliament. Neither did he only give command for the assembling of a general council, but sought to further it by his imperial authority, permitting some to take up his horses in his name, for the performance of this journey, and provided for their convenient travel by wagons and other means.”* — What a good emperor! to spend so much money, and take so much trouble, in the cause of TRUTH, about which he knew so little.

The council being convened, and the subjects in dispute being argued in the true style of angry and ambitious theologians, a CREED was at last formed, which the followers of Arius, under oppression of civil power, were compelled to SUBSCRIBE. Arius himself was banished, and, for the time being, ORTHODOXY, as it is fulsomely termed, triumphed. It would have been a melancholy fact in the history of human nature, if from that day onward, arians and socinians, whatever may have been their general doctrines on biblical subjects,

* Eusebius’ Life of Constantine.

had not been the sons of LIBERTY, — opposed to COUNCILS and CREEDS. One would naturally suppose that these heretics have fairly redeemed their pledge to the world; for to this hour the orthodox seem to be utterly at a loss to place an anti-creed-man any where excepting in Arian ranks.

The reader would, perhaps, like to see this FIRST creed, of the *first* œcumenical council, general synod, general conference, general association, general convention, or general assembly; for as to that council being œcumenical, there never was such a thing, and there never can be. It is as follows: “ We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible: and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, *i. e.* of the SUBSTANCE of the Father; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God: begotten, not made; of the same substance with the Father; by whom all things were made, that are in heaven, and that are in earth: who for us men, and for our salvation, descended, and was incarnate, and became man: suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead: and in the Holy Spirit. But those who say, that there was a time when he was not, and that he was not before he was begotten, and that he was made out of nothing; or affirm that he is of any other substance or essence; or that the Son of God is created, and mutable or changeable, the catholic church doth pronounce accursed.”* — Such was the “ form of sound words,” — as these instruments of ecclesiastical pow-

* It may be found in Soc. Ecc. His. p. 222, or in Murdoch's translation of Mosheim, vol. 1, p. 347. N. I quote from the last.

er are pompously styled — which the famous Council of Nice put forth. “This faith, three hundred and eighteen bishops,” says Socrates, “have confirmed, and all consented thereunto; and as Eusebius writeth, they all with one voice and one mind (*ex animo*, I presume,) subscribed thereunto. Five only excepted, which allowed not of this clause, viz. *of one substance*; for they affirmed that to be *of one substance*, which hath its original of something, either by division, or derivation, or production.”

The two combatants, who started this controversy, may be allowed to speak for themselves, in an essay intended to show the character of *scholastic theology*, in which creeds originated. “Alexander states that Arius and his adherents — Denying the divinity of our Saviour, pronounced him to be on a level with all other creatures. *He says that they held*, that there was a time, when the Son of God was not: and he who once had no existence, afterwards did exist; and from that time was, what every man naturally is: for (say they) God made all things of nothing, including the Son of God in this creation of all things, both rational and irrational: and of course pronouncing him to be of a changeable nature, and capable of virtue and of sin. — The doctrine just risen up in opposition to the piety of the church, is that of Ebion and Artemas, and is an imitation of that of Paul of Samosata. *Alexander then gives his own views as follows*: We believe, as the apostolic church does, in the only unbegotten Father, who derived his existence from no one, and is immutable and unalterable, always the same and uniform, unsusceptible of increase or diminution; the giver of the law and the prophets and the gospels; Lord of the

patriarchs and apostles and of all saints; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ; the only begotten Son of God; not begotten from nothing, but from the living Father: and not after the manner of material bodies, by separations and effluxes of parts, as Sabellius and Valentinian supposed; but in an inexplicable and indescribable manner, agreeably to the declaration before quoted. *Who shall declare his generation?* For his existence (hypostasis) is inscrutable to all mortal beings; just as the Father is inscrutable; because created intelligences are incapable of understanding this divine generation from the Father. — No one knoweth what the Father is, but the Son; and no one knoweth what the Son is, but the Father. — He is unchangeable as much as the Father; lacks nothing; is the perfect Son, and the absolute likeness of the Father, save only that he is not unbegotten. — Therefore to the unbegotten Father, his proper dignity must be preserved. And to the Son also suitable honour must be given, by ascribing to him an eternal generation from the Father.”

Arius, on the other hand, writes as follows: “To his very dear lord, that man of God, the faithful, orthodox Eusebius; Arius, who is unjustly persecuted by the Bishop Alexander, on account of that all-conquering truth which thou also defendest, greeting in the Lord. As my father Ammonius is going to Nicomedia, it seemed proper for me to address you by him, and to acquaint the native love and affection which you exercise towards the brethren for God and his Christ’s sake, that the bishop greatly oppresses and persecutes us, *putting every thing in motion against us*; and so as to drive us out of the city, as if we were

atheists ; because we do not agree with him, publicly asserting, that God always was, and the Son always was ; that he was always the Father, always the Son ; that the Son was of God himself ; and that because your brother Eusebius of Cesarea, and Theodotus, Paulinus, and Athanasius and Gregory and Aetus, and all they of the east, say that God was before the Son, and without beginning, they are accursed ; except only Philogonius and Hellanicus and Macarius, unlearned and heretical men, who say of the Son, one of them, that he is an eructation, another, that he is an emission, and another, that he is equally unbegotten ; which impieties we could not even hear, though the heretics should threaten us with a thousand deaths. As to what we say and believe, we have taught and still teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor a portion of the unbegotten, in any manner : nor was he formed out of any subjacent matter ; but that, in will and purpose, he existed before all times and before all worlds, perfect God, the only begotten, unchangeable, and that before he was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, he was not ; for he was never unbegotten. We are persecuted, because we say, the Son had a beginning, but God was without beginning. We are also persecuted, because we say, that he is from nothing ; and this we say, inasmuch as he is not a portion of God, nor formed from any subjacent matter. Therefore we are persecuted. The rest you know. I bid you adieu in the Lord.”*

Much more might be transcribed. But if the reader will compare these extracts with the creed of Gregory Thaumaturgus and the expressions of Origen, which I have furnished, he may have a very fair view

* Murdoch's trans. of Mosheim, vol. 1, pp. 344—'5.

of the character of scholastic theology, whose subtleties and disputes the Council of Nice, under the patronage of the state, was assembled to settle. When again he brings the history of ecclesiastical power alongside of that of scholastic theology, he may be able very satisfactorily to decide, whether these creeds have any **DIVINE WARRANT** or not?—Whether they are any thing more than *pagan relics*, grown up into “accredited documents” of false philosophy and bad theology?—whether an honest inquirer after truth, be he minister or layman, would not fare better by turning simply to the **BIBLE**?—and whether such theologians were competent to make a *creed*, even supposing it to be necessary?

A part of the history remains yet to be told, by way of illustrating the consequences of **CREEDS**. They have been represented not only as depositories and guardians of **TRUTH**, but as indispensably necessary to promote harmony, and keep out heretics. What are the facts, as belonging to these early times?

Arius, who had been banished, was afterwards recalled and **SUBSCRIBED** the creed, remaining unchanged in his heretical sentiments. How he could consent to do so dishonest an act, is mysterious to me. I could readily explain the whole, by supposing him to be a very wicked man; but when whole churches, which have subscribed the same creed, have been, and are still, very much divided in sentiment; and when men move along, unsuspectingly, under this singular system, and young men too, — ingenuous and frank, talented and promising, over whose good name I would not breathe one unkind suspicion,—I feel myself utterly at a loss, and wonder how these things can be? Be these things as they may, Arius subscribed the orthodox creed, and

his heresy grew and flourished, under cover of the imperial purple itself. — What an efficient thing a CREED must be !

Pope Liberius, “about the middle of the *fourth* century, when the Arian controversy was at its height, intimidated by the power of the reigning emperor Constantius, whom he knew to be a zealous disciple of Arius, declared publicly in favour of that party, and excommunicated Athanasius, whom all the orthodox regarded as the patron and defender of the catholic cause. This sentence he soon after revoked ; and after revoking it, his legates, at the council of Arles, overawed by the emperor, concurred with the rest in signing the condemnation of Athanasius ; yielding, as they expressed it, to the troublesome times. Afterwards, indeed, Liberius was so far a confessor in the cause of orthodoxy, that he underwent a long and severe banishment, rather than lend his aid and countenance to the measures, which the emperor pursued for establishing Arianism throughout the empire. But however firm and undaunted the pope appeared for a time, he had not the magnanimity to persevere ; but was at length, in order to recover his freedom, his country, and his bishopric, induced to retract his retraction, to sign a second time the condemnation of Athanasius, and to embrace the Arian symbol (creed) of Sirmium. Not satisfied with this, he even wrote to the Arian bishops of the east, excusing his former defence of Athanasius ; imputing it to an excessive regard for the sentiments of his predecessor Julius ; and declaring that now, since it had pleased God to *open his eyes*, and show him how justly the heretic Athanasius had been condemned, he separated himself from

his communion, and cordially joined their holinesses, (so he styled the Arian bishops) in supporting *the true faith*. Before he returned from exile, meeting with the emperor, who was by this time turned semi-Arian, the pliant pontiff, impatient to be again in possession of his see, was induced to change anew, and subscribe the semi-Arian confession.”* Lo, a Christian emperor become a HERETIC! Infallibility itself, opening its eyes, abjures orthodoxy — calls heretics “their holinesses” — and proclaims heresy “the true faith!” And all under the auspices of the creed system! And then here is this thing of SUBSCRIPTION again, compelling one to believe, that “the most corrupt, as well as the most excellent, can bear” a CREED, as easily as they can the BIBLE, when used as a TEST.

Socrates, an ecclesiastical historian in the *fifth* century, and from whom I have already quoted, gives a brief history of the first series of creeds in the following sentences. — “Now having at length run over *the confused multitude* of creeds and forms of faith, let us once again briefly repeat the number of them. After the creed that was laid down by the Nicene council, the bishops formed two others at Antioch, when they assembled to the dedication of the church. The *third* was made in France of the bishops which were at Narcessus, and exhibited unto the emperor Constantine. The *fourth* was sent by Eudoxius unto the bishops throughout Italy. *Three* were published in writing at Sirmium, whereof one being gloriously entitled with the names of consuls, was read at Ariminum. The *eighth* was set forth at Seleucia, and procured

* Campbell's Lec. on Ecc. His. p. 218.

to be read by the complices of Acacius. The *ninth* was given abroad with additions at Constantinople ; there was thereunto annexed, that thenceforth there should be *no mention made of the substance or the subsistency* of God. Whereunto Ulphilas, bishop of the Goths, then first of all subscribed : for unto that time he embraced the faith established by the council of Nice, and was an earnest follower of Theophilus' steps, bishop of the Goths, who had been at the Nicene council, and subscribed unto the creed." — So then creed after creed was introduced ; and if they were arrested at the time when Socrates stops, they had gone on multiplying, until the very matter, to establish which the first one had been made, was so far given up, that silence concerning it was enjoined. Harmony was thus sought by making a CREED to abolish CREEDS — at least, IN EFFECT. Such in truth is the nature of the whole system — IT MUST DESTROY ITSELF.

Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, in Aquitania, who flourished in the *fourth* century, "blames Constantius, the emperor, for the variety and contrariety of those creeds that were made after the council of Nice," and says to him — "You feign yourself to be a Christian, and you are the enemy of Jesus Christ ; you are become anti-Christ, and have begun his work : you intrude into the office of procuring new creeds to be made, and you live like a pagan." He also says, — "It is a thing equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are as *many creeds* as there are opinions among men ; as many doctrines as inclinations, and as many sources of blasphemy as there are faults among us ; BECAUSE WE MAKE CREEDS ARBITRARILY, AND EXPLAIN THEM AS

ARBITRARILY. And as there is but one faith, so there is but one only God, one Lord, and one baptism. We renounce this one faith, when we make so *many different creeds*; and that diversity is the reason why we have *no true faith* among us. We cannot be ignorant, that SINCE THE COUNCIL OF NICE, we have done nothing but make CREEDS. And while we fight against WORDS, litigate about new questions, dispute about equivocal TERMS, complain of authors, that every one may make HIS OWN PARTY triumph; while we cannot AGREE, while we anathematize one another, there is hardly ONE that adheres to JESUS CHRIST. What change was there not in the creed LAST YEAR. The first council ordained a silence on the *homoousion*; the second established it, and would have us speak; the third excuses the fathers of the council, and pretends they took the word *ousia* simply; the fourth condemns them, instead of excusing them. With respect to the likeness of the Son of God to the Father, which is the faith of our deplorable times, they dispute whether he is like in whole, or in part. These are rare folks to unravel the secrets of heaven. Nevertheless it is for these CREEDS, about invisible mysteries, that we calumniate one another, and for our belief in God. We make creeds every year; nay every moon we repent of what we have done, we defend those that repent, we anathematize those that we defended. So we condemn either the doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and, reciprocally tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of each other's ruin.”*

* Gibbon's dec. and fall. Locke's com. pl. book.

If the catholic church, technically so called, can sustain her sectarian claim of succession from the days of the apostles, what shall be said of the unity of the church in Hilary's time? If she boasts of always holding the same doctrine, even about the TRINITY, what became of the unity of faith, and trinitarian orthodoxy, when the bishop of Poitiers wrote? How does it happen that she changed her creed, so often, so rapidly, and so easily? Or what can a protestant defender of creeds say in view of truth and harmony? which creeds are supposed omnipotent to sustain, while ANY BODY may subscribe the BIBLE.

Gregory Nazianzen, who lived in the fourth century, when writing to Procopius, thus excuses his refusal to attend a synod, at which his presence was expected:—"To tell you plainly, I am determined to fly ALL CONVENTIONS OF BISHOPS; for I never yet saw a council that ended HAPPILY. Instead of lessening, they invariably AUGMENT the mischief. The passion for victory, and the lust of power, (you'll think my freedom intolerable) are not to be described in words. One present as a judge, will much more readily catch the infection from others, than be able to restrain it in them. For this reason I must conclude, that the only security of one's PEACE and VIRTUE is in retirement."

. After this, "from the *fifth* century downwards," says Mr. Campbell in his prelections on ecclesiastical history, "it became the mode, in all their controversies, to refer to the COUNCILS and FATHERS, in support of their dogmas, and to take as little notice of sacred writ, as if it no way concerned the faith and practice of a Christian." The bible was smuggled away from

the PEOPLE, and little studied by the priesthood. At this day, the bible, notwithstanding the efforts of the reformers, and the fact that every one may read it who pleases, has not recovered its proper position in educating the human mind for the divine service; but must be read under the interpretation of councils, and in correspondence with the opinions of the fathers. The Christian public may not speak very learnedly about the council of Nice; but they can talk very fluently of the Westminster assembly, or some such synodical convention, and uphold its creed as warmly as the papal church may commend some earlier association. The real fact is, as far as I am able to see, that the two churches, papal and protestant, move in parallel lines: and while the one acknowledges the supremacy of a single Lord, though old, decrepit, and shorn of his glory, the protestant bows to "many masters" in keeping up councils, which the other seems to have abandoned, unless they are now to be revived in America — the land of SYNODS.

I must not be accused of detailing the circumstances of an insulated case. The *principle* of this error has been the bane of society from the beginning. "The angels who kept not their first estate," by whom I understand "the sons of God" spoken of by Moses, abandoned the ritual connected with the antediluvian cherubim, and hastened to destruction. The descendants of Noah did not like to retain God in their knowledge; and when given up to a reprobate mind, they foolishly and sinfully built altars to the host of heaven, and worshipped stocks and stones. They lost their moral privileges, and sank into the most stupid ignorance, because they perverted the

simplicity of divine worship by inventions of their own. The Jews imitated the example, and wept over their wretched folly by the streams of Babel. Restored to their own land, they repeated their crime, though in a form more refined, and when the Redeemer appeared, the traditions of men had taken the place of the commandments of God. The political world, in different ages, has pursued a similar course; and under the commands of both civil and ecclesiastical rulers blood has flowed like rivers. The principle is both old and versatile; and yet Christians cannot, or will not, put away human inventions from the house of God. The deeds of councils are as foolish and harsh as ever; and yet they meet, and are admired and obeyed. They cannot make any *new creeds*, but they glory in old ones, as though the very causes of error were the only guardians against error. — Any man who candidly reviews the operations of councils will be convinced that they are still, as Gregory described them, the mere agents of mischief.

Well had it been for the American church, had her sons listened to the apostolic tones of Robinson, when he bid their pilgrim fathers an affectionate farewell. He said: —

“Brethren, — We are now quickly to part from one another; and whether I may ever live to see your faces on earth any more, the God of heaven only knows; but whether the Lord hath appointed that or no, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, that you follow me no farther than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

“If God reveal any thing to you, by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you

were to receive any truth by my ministry ; for I am verily persuaded, the Lord has more truth, yet to break forth out of his holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a PERIOD in religion, and will go at present no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw ; whatever part of his will God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it ; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things.

“ This is a misery much to be lamented ; for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God ; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received. I beseech you remember, it is an article of your church covenant, that you be ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God. Remember that, and every other article of your sacred covenant. But I must herewithal exhort you to take heed what you receive as truth ; examine it, consider it, and compare it with other scriptures of truth, before you receive it ; for it is not possible the christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-Christian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.”*

Well, I say, had it been for the American church, had her sons listened to the noble strains of Robinson. Ere now the reflection of moral liberty, like that of

* Neal's His. Pur. vol. II. pp. 146—'7.

political freedom, might have spread all its mildness and benevolence over the old world. Their doctrine of ecclesiastical establishments might, long since, have been exhibited in its own weakness; and such men as Dr. Chalmers would not, as he does, appeal to the United States in proof of the necessity of establishments. But instead of this we are told that no farther truth is to be discovered from the word of the Lord; we are hearing incessant eulogies on the wisdom and piety of the fathers; no man can touch human inventions without being "in danger of the council;" and old dogmas are still the matter of angry strife, and the fondlings of ecclesiastical courts. How long these things shall continue, no one can foresee. But the rains are descending, the floods are coming, the winds are blowing, and the waves are beating — and the house that is founded on **THE ROCK** alone shall stand.

I have now traced these creeds as instruments of ecclesiastical power to their origin. They commenced as an imitation of pagan ceremonies — they were countenanced by ecclesiastics as they rose to papal eminence — they were brought in under the signature of a civil ruler — they have been called for by the strifes of scholastic theologians — and they are handed down to our days as the relics of great and good men; whose works and actions will not bear inspection, and who have received the homage which is due only to their Master's word. If the whole argument be not true, then let the reader reject it. But let him first examine it, candidly, and for himself.

CHAPTER IX.

Candidates for the Ministry—How are they to be estimated.

Nothing can be of more vital importance to the church, than the character and qualifications of her ministry. The short historic abstract, which has been given, abundantly evinces that fact. The very nature of the thing shows it, inasmuch as every community will be estimated by the exhibitions of her official men. They are the personifications of the *spirit* of the community. In them that spirit resides for official purposes. By them the public will is manifested, and through them public influence is felt. In civil institutions this object of official commission is fully understood. In the church the principle is the same, though the influence exerted should be simply moral. Jehovah has intended that ministerial men should be **IMAGES** of himself,—as Paul calls them “the **GLORY** of Christ”—or examples to the flock, over whom they are made overseers. It is manifestly important that these should be faithful and honourable men. For,—according to the old adage, in which there is much truth, “like priest, like people”—if they are men of “wisdom and power, and full of the Holy Ghost,” the moral influence they shall exert, will be of the happiest kind. But if they are base, immoral, ambitious, and intriguing, the church will grow corrupt in their hands.

The advocates of **CREEDS** profess themselves to be exceedingly concerned about this matter. They state

it to be their great desire to preserve the purity of the church, and to prevent the inroads of error. Giving them all due credit for good intentions, yet they must suppose that others, who may differ with them about the worth of creeds, can cherish as much concern, in relation to the great object in view, as themselves. They might also concede, that their Master, who, though he has not furnished any other creed than the *bible*, nor allowed his ministers to make any other, and yet hath "fenced his vineyard," and asks — "what more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" has more concern for "the travail of his soul," than any of his servants. Instead of prohibiting his servants from exercising a lordship over one another, he might have entrusted them with legislative powers, and the means of executing their own laws. Besides, the brethren should recollect, that councils have been in vogue ever since the *second*, and creeds ever since the *fourth*, centuries; and that the experiment has been long and ample, and varied enough. It has been sustained under an œcumenical patronage, and backed by all the power of the state. It has been *reformed*, and tried again. The means of information have been taken away — the very idea of liberty, or of the right to think and act for oneself, has been extinguished — the human mind has been reduced to the lowest state of weakness, and all will not do! The priests became corrupt and wicked as the people had been supposed to be — popery grew up — protestants appeared and divided into sects — not one single principle is settled to this hour — what more can the church want with councils and creeds? Could things have possibly

been worse? Could the ministry have been more wretchedly furnished for the high enterprise, to which their office called them? The purity and peace of the church have been sacrificed by the very means intended to promote them.

On the other hand, it should be recollected, that candidates for the ministry have their own rights, which no consideration whatever should induce them to surrender. If the kingdom of God is to be set up in the world, it is also to be set up in the individual heart. In both positions, it is uniform in principle and influence; and one must not be abandoned for the sake of the other. No social institution, no public office, is worth a good conscience. The young man, who sullies his conscience to get into the ministry, receives no recompense by "the imposition of the hands," either of the bishop or the presbytery; nor does the church gain a benefit by her stretch of power. A fearful reaction occurs in both cases, and the whole association hastens to ruin. Immortal spirits shall live in glory, when the heavens and the earth shall pass away — of what worth then can the sectarian institutions of men boast?

Suppose that a candidate for the ministry should differ from his brethren — who made their opinions a rule to his conscience? or an agreement with them, the *sine qua non* of his introduction into the ministry? Suppose that a coincidence of opinion be necessary for mutual edification, — yet with whom must the individual in question coincide in opinion? With a **PRESBYTERY** that carries nothing more of a scriptural institution than the name? — with a **SYNOD**, that can go no farther back for its commission than the end of

the *second* century, and is the mere imitation of Grecian confederacies? — or with the PEOPLE, to whom the choice of officers has been so often referred in the scriptures? If to the PEOPLE this matter is to be referred, then a creed sinks into a “church covenant,” or one of the “early symbols,” derived, as is betrayed in the preface to the *Savoy* confession, from a servile imitation of surrounding institutions. If to the PEOPLE, then *power* sinks, and liberty rises. For the system of government, as it now stands, cannot be sustained, and never had appeared, without synodical conventions, or a papal supremacy. Let ecclesiastical matters be restored to this management, to which the Master committed them, and where, until the rise of episcopal pretensions, they remained, and every politician in the land can predict what the result will be. American politics have rendered that process to liberty very familiar and plain. — But such a retrograde movement, I presume, is not EXPEDIENT, — which, when literally translated, means CONVENIENT.

It is a very singular view to take of social life, that communities should not contain the materials of their own operation. Something purely artificial must then be called for. Theological seminaries, traced back, like creeds to early symbols, seem to have grown up as the consequence of parents neglecting to educate their children, and indolently falling in with the happy device of catechetical schools — which were, no doubt, the voluntary and benevolent associations of that day. Education societies, more equivocal still, growing up under more modern circumstances, appear to be the results of a benevolent spirit; which, undertaking great things, has not acquired intelligence

enough to direct its operations; and which, like as in the incipient stages of scholastic theology, is sustained in its wanderings by a foolish and sinful pride. The community is not furnished with civilians, physicians, legislators and magistrates in this way; and yet methinks, in this department of human life, learning, intelligence, and social influence are as necessary, as in the Christian church. Political economy, it appears to me, has taken a different direction, and a loftier flight. Universal education, and on moral principles too, is the scheme which the advocates of this new science have proposed. They are taking the work of ecclesiastics out of their hands; are descanting on the value of the moral sense; and teaching the scriptural doctrine of regeneration on political grounds. **THE PEOPLE**, who have been deprived of their rights by false systems of government, are beginning, and successfully too, to re-assert their rights. As then political communities furnish their own officers, and no longer depend on some overbearing aristocracy, general education has become indispensably necessary. And in such a condition of society, will ecclesiastics still foster worn out institutions? or go no faster with the times than to erect some equivocal pauper associations? They must quit all sectarian policy; they must traverse the ecclesiastical ground, surveyed by inspired men, in all its length and breadth; and adopt the most liberal principles of operation, by which the whole church shall be fully qualified to govern herself, and furnish her own ministers, as she did in the days of the apostles. If they will not do this, but will still maintain the ordinances of ages that have passed away, ministerial men must lose public confidence, li-

centiousness will come in like a flood, and the people will perish, because there is no vision.

One would think, from the arguments that are advanced, the many schemes that are devised, and the multitude of canons that have been enacted, that the scriptures are entirely silent on the interesting subject of the ministry and their qualifications. Yet the provisions are ample, the directions distinct, and the facts numerous, from which the church should learn how to supply her altars with ministering servants. I propose now to collect in one view some of the scriptural precepts and facts.

The interest which the PEOPLE, as such, and as having a right to take a part in deliberating and acting, possess, has already been mentioned. But they are not supposed to act at random, disregarding their own interests, or forgetting their responsibility to the Master. "Wherefore, brethren," said Peter, "look ye out among you seven men of *honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*, whom we may appoint over this business."* They were forbidden to divide into parties, and to follow different leaders, — to go after either Peter, or Paul, or Apollos, or even to make a party by vainly arrogating the name of Christ, or to consider preachers of the gospel as any thing more than ministers, or servants, by whom they believed. The PEOPLE, when undertaking to govern themselves and elect their own officers, may commit, and have committed mistakes; but that has been generally under some provocation or excitement, when not cherishing a good spirit, they put themselves into a situa-

* Acts, vi. 3.

tion where any one may go wrong. They fell into error on this subject in the apostles' days, and were often reproved, but still their rights were never taken from them. Such things must be left to correct themselves, and that by the enlightening of the public mind. Besides, the objection may be made against human associations in any form, and against none with more force, than against presbyteries and synods, of whom, according to Gregory Nazianzen, it may be briefly said, they have done more mischief than good.

Some principles of social organization are transferred from the former, to the present dispensation, without any very specific regulations. In this way the influence of the popular voice could be very readily recognized by the apostles, as a matter which should occasion no dispute. Neither Saul nor David, though specifically pointed out by the prophet, as Jehovah's legate, could be inaugurated without a popular election. Every prophet furnished his documents to the **PEOPLE**. In the days of the Redeemer, scribes and pharisees were very much afraid of the **PEOPLE**. He and his disciples addressed themselves directly to the **PEOPLE**. The gospel is a popular institute, and ministers are popular officers. The general principle, I advocate, would then be very naturally acknowledged, and was continued in the church, until synods acquired power: and now our church courts have the matter almost entirely in their own hands.

When Peter called upon the **PEOPLE** to elect seven men to attend to "the daily ministration," he added — "whom **WE MAY APPOINT** over this business." The official men, who had been already ordained by the Lord himself, had therefore an interest and a

part in the ceremony, or work, of furnishing the church with ministerial agents. On the same principle, the PRESBYTERY — i. e. a bench of ELDERS belonging to an individual church or congregation, as each communion table had its own presbytery, and each church was independent — the presbytery ordained Timothy by the imposition of hands. The evangelists, who appear to have been helpers of the apostles, also, it would seem, ordained ELDERS. Official men, thus employed, were under the necessity of judging of the same qualifications which had been mentioned to the people. While the one should *elect*, the other should appoint to office, *men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.*

In the larger details given by Paul to Timothy and Titus, they were required to “ordain elders” or bishops, “in every city.” Every community should furnish its own official men; but in the discharge of their own duties, these evangelists were to require particular things. These things were of course to be regarded by the people in making their selection, and deserve special consideration in the present inquiry. I will state them.

“If any man,” says Paul, “desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” Office in the church, a man may for himself desire. He seeks after “a good work,” and appears to serve the Master in a course of active duty, of his own free choice. Who can assign any reason, why such a man’s wishes should not be very particularly and tenderly consulted? A mind, thus affected, is most likely to catch the spirit of the work, and to be devoted efficiently to the high calling. He, who goes reluctantly to min-

ister at the altar, will likely grow indifferent and cold, will flag and fail, and not be found at every turn where official work is to be done. Like Gregory Thaumaturgus he cannot get along without a CREED, afforded by the Virgin Mary, or some one of equal authority. Besides every man is a free agent, and may determine on his own course. An *election* to office cannot compel him to serve; and a being persuaded to do what his own heart does not desire to do, will not be very likely to imbue him with the requisite spirit. It may possibly be his duty to obey a public call, and bring his mind up to the work. He may sin in declining, through false motives, or because his life has not been parallel to his privileges—he has not lived up to his station. The call he declines may fairly result from the relations in which divine providence has placed him; and if he is not prepared to meet that call, the fault is his own. A man's own views and feelings form a very important matter of consideration, in selecting and ordaining to office. God himself “loves a cheerful giver,” and his servants should take great care how they reject such an one.

It does not, however, follow, that because a man may “*desire* the office of a bishop,” he must be either elected by the people, or ordained by the presbytery. Certain qualifications are necessary, and can never be safely disregarded. “A bishop,” says Paul, “must be *blameless*—the husband of one wife—vigilant—sober—of good behaviour—given to hospitality—*apt to teach*—not given to wine—no striker—not given to filthy lucre—patient—not a brawler—not covetous—one that ruleth well his own house—not a novice—of good report with those that are with-

out." Another description of the bishop's qualifications is furnished by the same apostle, and is as follows:—"A bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God—not self-willed—not soon angry—not given to wine—not a striker—not given to filthy lucre—but a lover of hospitality—a lover of good men—sober—just—holy—temperate—holding fast *the faithful word*, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gain-sayers." The directions, given in view of ordaining men, are the following, and such like:—"The things that thou hast **HEARD** of me among **MANY WITNESSES**, the same commit thou to *faithful* men, who shall be able to **TEACH** others also.—Lay hands suddenly on no man.—Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.—Meditate upon these things—give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all."

It is worthy of remark, that learning, or great philological acquisition, or varied literature, has not been mentioned. Indeed men of that description would not have been expected, in that age, to associate themselves with a cause that was every where spoken against. It was "hardly" possible "for such to enter the kingdom of heaven." They were otherwise occupied—were industriously engaged in defending and sustaining old institutions—saw nothing to gain and every thing to lose—holding power and wealth, they could not be calculated on as agents of revolution—they lacked the honesty, the courage, the moral sympathies of such an enterprise. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called; but God **CHOSE** the foolish things of the

world to confound the wise — the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty — and base things of the world, and things which are despised, God **CHOSE**, yea, and things that **ARE NOT** to bring to nought things that **ARE**.” And when the new system was established, so that it should be described as a thing that **IS**, while that which should be suspended would be described as a thing that **WAS**, but **IS NOT**, he left the whole to its own natural progress, under the direction of its own constitutional principles.

It is farther worthy of remark, that even “spiritual gifts” — the power of prophesying, of working miracles, of speaking with tongues, — are not mentioned by the apostle, as belonging to the qualifications of a bishop, or an elder. These might have been conferred, had the Master so pleased, or had they belonged to the ordinary transactions of ministerial service. But those items which have been detailed by the apostle, according to his own argument to the Corinthians, were “more excellent” than spiritual gifts. And when spiritual gifts had served their purpose, *i. e.* when the divine character and origin of the new dispensation had been fully demonstrated, they were withdrawn; so that, as the historian asserts, “the bishops of primitive times were, for the most part, plain and illiterate men, remarkable rather for their piety and zeal, than for their learning and eloquence.”

The **PEOPLE** were fully qualified to judge of such official attributes as these, — as well qualified as any presbytery, — and apostles would have respected their judgment. Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium; and at their recommendation Paul took him as a companion. These

brethren gave a good report of Timothy's character and deportment, individually and socially considered, because they were able to judge. Like things are exhibited in the present day. The PEOPLE do now-a-days judge of these qualifications of ministers. Some — alas too many — whom a presbytery may license or ordain, they will not receive; and others they will sustain in defiance of the presbytery. In some branches of the church the right of ELECTING their own ministers is conceded to the people, because it is presumed that they are fully qualified to judge; in other branches they must take such as these rulers please to give them, because, I suppose, they are not thought to be competent to judge for themselves.

These popular rights were, it would seem, freely admitted in the primitive church, or after the canon of scripture was closed, and the apostles had gone to their reward. King reports, that — “ALL THE PEOPLE OF A DIOCESE were present at church censures; as Origen describes an offender as appearing *before the whole church*. So Clemens Romanus calls the censures of the church, *the things commanded by the multitude*. And so the two offending sub-deacons and acolyth at Carthage were to be tried *before the whole PEOPLE*.

“No offenders were restored again to the church's peace, without the knowledge and consent of the whole diocese. So Cyprian writes, that before they were re-admitted to communion *they were to plead their cause before all the people*. And it was ordained by an African synod, that, except in danger of death, or an instantaneous persecution, none should be received into the church's peace, *without the knowledge and consent of the people*.

“When the bishop of a church was dead, all the people of that church met together in one place to choose a new bishop. So Sabinus was elected bishop of Emerita, *by the suffrage of all the brotherhood*; which was also the custom throughout all Africa *for the bishop to be chosen in the presence of the people*. And so Fabianus was chosen to be bishop of Rome *by all the brethren who were met together in one place for that very end*.

“At the ordinations of the clergy the whole body of the people were present. So an African synod held A. D. 258, determined, *that the ordination of ministers ought to be done with the knowledge, and in the presence of the people; that, the people being present, either the crimes of the wicked may be detected, or the merits of the good declared; and so the ordination may be just and lawful, being approved by the suffrage and judgment of all*. And bishop Cyprian writes from his exile to all the people of his diocese—*That it had been his constant practice in all ordinations to consult their opinions, and by their common counsels to weigh the manners and merit of every one; therein imitating the example of apostles and apostolical men, who ordained none, but with the approbation of the whole church.*”

Now-a-days, a presbytery, or ecclesiastical council,—a court not recognized in the scriptures,—has taken this whole subject away from the PEOPLE. Or it may be that a BISHOP, with cape and mitre, holds himself as fully qualified to receive and use the high prerogative. The idea of a scriptural presbytery, *i. e.* a bench of elders in each individual and independent congregation, ordaining candidates for the minis-

try, at the call, or in coincidence with the opinions, of the people, would be considered a gross INNOVATION — heretical, inexpedient, and irresponsible. Elders are considered as LAYMEN, and ordination is too sacred a ceremony for their plebeian hands. Bishops, with high patrician pretensions, belonging to some particular district, assemble without any divine warrant, and as learned men, seek to ordain learned men. The qualifications transcribed from the scriptures will not avail. A young man may have them all, and be highly recommended by “the brethren,” as far as the brethren may individually and privately speak; but ecclesiastical men have their CREED that must be *subscribed*, and certain literary requisitions to be met; and unless the canons of councils, or the municipal regulations of sect, are complied with, the scriptural qualifications avail nothing.

I am not an enemy to literature. But while the community, as such, is not decidedly literary in its character, and particularly while that community is new and sparse, it is an impracticable thing to furnish a literary ministry, — as is abundantly evident, in this country, by the forced operations of education societies. If the scheme were practicable, yet when such a ministry is afforded, they cannot pursue a literary course, having neither means, nor leisure, nor inducement. The community, for whose benefit they labour, need not, nor can they appreciate, and will be offended by the popular use of, such boasted acquisitions. To persevere in such a course, is to raise up a class of men, who, from the nature of the case, must be destitute of sympathy with the PEOPLE; who will rise above the PEOPLE as being their superiors and gover-

nors; and who will ultimately distract and divide the church by their philosophical subtleties and literary distinctions. How many vacancies are now calling for ministers! how many ministers have come forth with a literary reputation, who have long since betrayed its inefficiency, or have learned to disregard it; so that in a thousand instances it is mere pretence. The community must have the best of such classes, as they are able to appreciate them; and those classes generally include men of good character and popular address, as well as, in a society which is cultivated and refined, men of education. There must always be a proportion between agents and their objects. They who use a thing, are the best judges of its qualities. The people know far better than the presbyteries, as presbyteries are now constructed, what ministers will suit them: though presbyteries may better understand what kind of agents are necessary for the purposes of ecclesiastical government.

It may, perhaps, be asserted that the scriptures go much farther than the preceding schedule of ministerial qualifications, and employ a test of DOCTRINE, as well as of character and gifts. Forexample: the apostle John calls upon the church, to "TRY the spirits whether they are of God; and not to believe every spirit, because that false prophets have gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." True: but this is still a direction to the PEOPLE; and includes officers no farther, than as each individual church had its own presbytery, or bench

of elders. So also Paul addressed the Colossians as a church — “the saints and faithful brethren,” and adds — “when this epistle *is read among you*, cause that it be read also in *the church* of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” So the *church* at Jerusalem received the reference from Antioch on the subject of circumcision; “the apostles and elders, with *the whole church*” sent a reply; and at Antioch the reply, or epistle, was delivered to THE WHOLE MULTITUDE, when they gathered together for the purpose. So also King reports concerning the general practice of the primitive church — “Public letters from one church to another were read before the whole diocese. Thus Cornelius, bishop of Rome, whatever letters he received from foreign churches, *he always read them to his most holy and numerous people.*”

I object not to the apostle’s direction. For there are principles of doctrine belonging to every association. Though there ought not to be human CREEDS, yet there may be an inspired BIBLE; and though there ought not to be ecclesiastical COUNCILS, derived from human authority, yet there may be a CHURCH, consecrated by the Master. Though a SYNOD OF BISHOPS have not been empowered to determine orthodoxy for the people, yet the PEOPLE may determine for themselves.

It has been said that on such a principle, we shall have every sort of doctrine; and the people are considered to be incompetent to decide what is orthodox, and to determine cases of heresy. The Master thought not so; for the bible is addressed to the PEOPLE, and they are commanded to be on their guard, and

not to believe every spirit. And then, on the other hand, while ecclesiastics have had their full sway; and the people have been put aside, until it is thought to be almost ridiculous to talk about their rights ; or to calculate upon any other results from popular movements than heresy and discord, have we not had every sort of doctrine? Have creeds and councils really settled what orthodoxy is, any more, than they have the term *catholic*, as a sectarian appellation? How far has the controversy between trinitarians and unitarians enlightened the public mind? Or what more do theologians know in relation to the test afforded by the apostle John, than the PEOPLE do? . And surely they who so promptly condemn popular pretensions, and trace every manner of evil to popular influence, ought, as wise and discreet men, to have avoided all liability to incur a like imputation. The attempt to extract a mote from the eye of another, while a beam is in our own, has long since been censured by the Master as hypocrisy.

By the way, I may inquire what is the import of the apostle's declaration, which has been quoted as a TEST? In pursuing such an inquiry, the scriptures demand of their students to "compare spiritual things with spiritual." I therefore quote another text, of similar phraseology and bearings, and which refers the matter in hand to the very *nature of the case*; or exhibits it as an elemental principle, of which, methinks, the PEOPLE, unless they live under the degrading maxim — "ignorance is the mother of devotion,"—are fully qualified to judge. It is this—"He that cometh to God *must believe* that HE IS, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Both people and ministers **MUST** believe that **HE IS**, or neither can come to God. The people then should try the minister in relation to that, which they themselves **MUST** know. And do not the people know what is meant by the phrase—**HE IS**? Do theologians know what is meant by it? If there be the least difficulty about it, has not that difficulty arisen from ecclesiastics? because, convening in **COUNCILS**, they would make **CREEDS**, and substituted a human dogma for a divine truth:—and all too by way of declaring orthodoxy! Had they left the subject as a plain matter, of which any body might have judged, or with the people, to whom inspired writers addressed it, **ALL** might have understood the whole matter better at present. Trinitarian and unitarian speculations have misrepresented and beclouded the whole subject—as I believe. Certain it is, that something else, than any of them have taught, is necessary in order to relieve the minds of all; which, even the **TRUTH** itself may not do, until men shall know how to unlearn what they have learned.

I shall attempt nothing more than to furnish a few like phrases; for the apostle in saying—**HE IS**, uses familiar scriptural terms.—“**I AM** hath sent me unto you.”—“**Before Abraham was—I AM.**” The apostle John by quoting this declaration from the lips of the Redeemer, intends to prove the propositions on which the mediatorial institute is based, which are,—“**In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with Jehovah, and the Word was ELOHIM—and the Word was MADE FLESH, and DWELT among us.**” The truth involved is the same which Moses taught to the children of Israel—“**Hear, O**

Israel, Jehovah our ELOHIM is one Jehovah." As ELOHIM, Jehovah said—I AM. As the Word manifested *in the flesh*, Christ said to the Jews—I AM.*

The scriptural phrases applied to man, to which I refer, are as follows: "Before Abraham WAS—Enoch walked with God, and he WAS NOT, for God took him.—Our fathers sinned and ARE NOT.—Things, which ARE NOT, to bring to nought things that ARE—The things which ARE, and the things which SHALL BE—The child IS NOT—Joseph IS NOT and Simeon IS NOT.—'Thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I SHALL NOT BE—Spare me, before I go hence and BE NO MORE. Other like expressions might be adduced.

The verb employed on these and like occasions, signifies TO BE—to EXIST—to SUBSIST. Applied to a human being, the reference is to his existence in this life, or in the body. When the psalmist, for example, speaks of being NO MORE, he does not mean that he ceases to exist as a thinking, intelligent, being. He has ceased to exist in the body, and has gone to BE with Christ. As a familiar mode of speech in the present day, to BE NO MORE, signifies that he, of whom such a thing is affirmed, has ceased to exist in the body.

God IS—he subsists in FORM—he has MANIFESTED himself. Christ BEING IN THE FORM OF GOD, has taken the FORM of a servant, and IS FOUND in fashion as a MAN. The Word was made FLESH and DWELT among us. Here is the starting point of evangelical truth, and must be believed. He,

* See my Lectures on Genesis.

that believeth it, is of God,—is a Christian, or preaches the gospel. He that believeth it not, is not of God,—is not a Christian; and whatever he may preach, he preaches not the gospel. The simplicity of the TEST is like that at the basis of the Mosaic economy, and which was to be believed —“Hear, O Israel, Jehovah, our Elohim, is one Jehovah.” Thus it is that God is—he subsists in external form. Jesus Christ is IN THE FLESH, or subsists in the flesh—is come in the flesh. Such has been the great scriptural, evangelic, fact; though now, that he has gone to the Father, we know him NO MORE after the flesh. He *is come*—he had been long promised, and has at last appeared. HE DWELT IN THE FLESH AMONG US—he has now entered his rest, and is at the right hand of God.

The belief of this cardinal point—this glorious fact—which Origen and his compeers, which the Council of Nice and its irreconcilable leaders or disputants, have so beclouded and obscured by their unintelligible speculations, was the great matter, belief in which John called on the PEOPLE to TRY. And verily the PEOPLE are as competent to try it as their RULERS.

Suppose then a minister—blameless, faithful, apt to teach—believing the great truth now defined, *i. e.* THE WORD MADE FLESH, should come to preach—who has a right to prevent him, or to refuse to recognize him as a true bishop, and to stigmatize him as a heretic. The apostle John says that HE IS OF GOD; and any trial, to which the statute in question would subject him, must result in the unequivocal recognition of that fact. Presbyteries, as they are now con-

structed, will not, and cannot, admit such a man to ministerial and church fellowship, without violating the principles of their party. They will not, and cannot, ORDAIN such a man, without something more. The PEOPLE, if they were let alone, would, or might, receive such a man, and unhesitatingly go to hear him; while they do not hear, with small exceptions, the man who does not believe that Christ is come in the flesh. Under such circumstances, what mischief would the most extensive liberality produce? How far astray would an individual, such as I have described, go? with an attachment to the bible, equal to that which sectarians evince for their creeds; and with a measure of diligent and various study, equal to that which sectarians expend on their systems. A difference in intellectual training, in external circumstances, in philosophical speculation, might be as safely admitted, as they are in the political, literary, or commercial world. Errors would not be perpetuated; errorists might be corrected; passions would not be kindled, or would be speedily extinguished; the public mind, accustomed to judge, would learn to judge correctly; extraneous matters would be left out of consideration; parties would die with the excitement that gave them birth; and love to the brethren would be the law of the church. Such a state of things is what politicians call LIBERTY; and under its direction the collisions which are incidental to human beings, produce no harm to the general body. Every man feels that he has a right to THINK; and the result will be, that every man will learn to THINK. Let the experiment be fairly tried, and the millenium will shed its brightest glories over our troubled world.

CHAPTER X.

Subject Continued — The Redeemer's example and explanations.

THERE is another part of this general argument, and one which involves the course pursued by the Lord himself, to which I must invite the attention of my reader. Jesus, having "come in the flesh," says of himself, that he did not come to "destroy men's lives, but to save them;" and informed his disciples, when they solicited some harsh interference with their fellow men — "Ye know not what manner of SPIRIT — dispensation — ye are of." The spirit of prophecy had foretold concerning him — "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth." This prophecy is applied by an evangelist, as fulfilled, when Jesus withdrew himself from a pharisaic council, who were plotting his destruction; and when he charged an individual not to spread, officiously, the intelligence of a miraculous cure of which he had been the subject. On this train of circumstances, I remark,

1. That the Redeemer avoided every thing like pomp and ceremony; the very things for which the Jews were looking at the time, and of which voluntary associations are excessively fond. His kingdom came not "with observation" — pomp of office, show of influence, bustle in action, external splendour in

project. None had more power, and yet none exerted it more carefully or circumspectly. He would not call "legions of angels" to his service—the sword he forbid to be employed on his behalf—money he discarded as an instrument of his operation—he would not be a king—nor would he suffer his disciples to accept titles of honour. He was "meek and lowly"—made himself of no reputation—became a servant—and was finally "perfected through sufferings." His ministers are called to be like him. How differently have they acted? Pomp, power, wealth, and external show, have been the fond objects of their thought and pursuit, until all the world has been both startled and offended by their glitter and display.

2. He would use no violent measures to put down opposition, nor in dealing with the weak, the ignorant and the profane. "A bruised reed he would not break, and the smoking flax he would not quench." The Jewish nation became his enemy. The dispensation, under which that people had been placed, was about to expire; every part of it was, at that time, relaxed and fading away—it was a "bruised reed" he might easily have broken—"smoking flax" he might easily have quenched; but such was, at no time, the character of his proceedings. He did not come to "destroy men's lives, but to save them." The SCRIPTURES, in such a case, were his rule: these, said he, must be fulfilled; and human modes of acting, or a course of policy which men think to be inefficient, and without which, they imagine, nothing can be done, must be abandoned.—Ecclesiastics who determine on violent measures, and act with vindictive cruelty, or who refuse simply to fulfil the SCRIPTURES, know

not what manner of spirit — dispensation — they are of.

3. The grand object of his concern, which he never lost sight of, and from which he derived his impulse, was **TRUTH**. “For this end,” said he to Pilate, “was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the **TRUTH**.” He acted undisguisedly and unreservedly on the broad principle, which so many readily concede, as it is wrapped up in the maxim — “Great is truth, and it will prevail.” All other agents, such as mankind so highly praise and so cheerfully employ, — as **MONEY** and **PHYSICAL POWER**, — appear not in his official calculations. He relied on **TRUTH**. “Wisdom is a defence,” said Solomon, “and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.” Such was the mediatorial philosophy and policy, which the Son of God taught by his example.

There are discouragements attendant on such a course. It requires time and patience. But the Redeemer should not fail nor be discouraged. He waited for the effects of the splendid experiment. Nothing could tempt him to step aside from his path, nor to alter his course. A crown was proffered — money was brought — multitudes waited for his bidding — friends besought and reproached him — his enemies plotted his destruction — death, and ignominy were before him — a few disciples only remained with him — but he failed not, neither was he discouraged. He went on, guided by the scriptures, and sustained by truth; he was “crucified and buried;” and when he rose, he charged his disciples to walk in his footsteps.

Would to God his ministers had obeyed the injunction. Neither popery nor protestant sectarianism ; neither political establishments nor voluntary associations, should have disgraced the annals of the church. Would to God that ministers might return to their allegiance and their duty. Guided by TRUTH, they would carry the banner of the cross from the rising to the setting of the sun.

The general direction, which the Redeemer gave to his disciples, and that in view of the ABUNDANCE of the harvest, was, that they should "pray the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." At the time "multitudes" were following him. A mighty difficulty was thus presented. Human wisdom and skill could not manage the combination. Ecclesiastical courts, with all their theological seminaries and education societies, cannot manage it now. The attempt, that is thus made, dazzles by its apparent magnificence, while it is too small a remedy to cover the case. Society is too broad to be managed by human rules and provisions. It must be left to its own operations under divine providence. The Master's direction is founded in the nature of society. Our ecclesiastical politicians have merged the Master's law in their own schemes. They cry out for *means* ; but for means to meet a case which they cannot meet by the means they prescribe. The use of means is necessary, but the means belong to the divine constitution itself ; and these means they exchange for those of their own invention. Political legislators have often committed the same mistake ; and the idea is now becoming a common one, as the result of fair experiment, that they have legislated *too much*, and that they had

better let many things alone. It is this same mistake, ecclesiastically speaking, that I censure. There has been, and there is, too much legislation. Things ought to have been let alone. The constitution, established and superintended by Jehovah, was better than any system which mankind have ever devised. He has framed the reciprocal relations of human life according to their own nature ; and has united as much government and as much liberty, as the case will admit. To bring in more government, is to destroy liberty, as the fact has exhibited. The concern of the Spirit of God is with TRUTH ; he seeks to convince the human MIND of truth, and ever acts according to the nature of both. Hence it is that the intermeddlers with the one have destroyed the other, and that ecclesiastical power and scholastic theology have sustained each other. Our ecclesiastical tribunals have been inimical to both liberty and truth : ordinations, presbyterially and episcopally speaking, have been referred to agents the least qualified to judge. The church must return to the constitution which God has established in consistency with the nature of things, and to that providence which protects its edifying operation. The Redeemer intended that his servants should act like himself—should be anointed with the same Spirit, and should sustain the same constitutional principles. Pastors and teachers, like the Master, are GIFTS of divine PROVIDENCE.

His own practice corresponded with all that has been advanced. Passing by men of reputed ecclesiastical standing and influence, he sought for those of moral attributes. The “man that is worthy”—seems to have been a favorite phrase with him. The qualifications, which his disciples evinced at any particular

time, he referred to a providential superintendence, as in the case of Peter's confession, when he said — "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." Hence he told his disciples that they should be partakers with him in his baptism, and bid them to rely most unreservedly on the teaching, counsel, and aid of the Holy Spirit.

A very interesting incident occurred in the course of the Redeemer's ministry, which has been reported by three of the evangelists; which, in my judgment has been greatly misrepresented; and which, I suppose, bears directly on the subject in hand. I shall copy the account from the first, wishing the reader to compare the whole. It is as follows:

"And, behold, one came and said unto him — Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him — which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder — Thou shalt not commit adultery — Thou shalt not steal — Thou shalt not bear false witness — Honour thy father and mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, — Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly en-

ter into the kingdom of heaven. And again, I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, — who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, — With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter, and said unto him, — Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them — Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first, shall be last; and the last shall be first.”*

The individual in question was a **YOUNG** man — was a **RICH** man — was a **RULER** — and had formed a lofty idea of the Redeemer's pretensions, having heard his doctrines, and seen his miracles. He addressed Jesus as a teacher, calling him **MASTER**; and as one, in whose enterprise he took a deep interest, calling him **GOOD Master**.

The term **INHERIT** *may* be interpreted as official. Noah was the **HEIR** of the righteousness of faith — Abraham was the **HEIR** of the world — Christ was the **HEIR** of all things — the oldest son was the **HEIR**, or

* Mat. xix. 16—30. Mark x. 17—31. Luke xviii. 18—30.

entitled to all official distinctions. Christ is said to have obtained by *inheritance*, a more excellent NAME than his fellows. The descendants of Abraham are said to have INHERITED the promises.

The phrase EVERLASTING LIFE *may* be interpreted on the same principle. The Mosaic economy has been called “the ministration of DEATH,” and the new economy might be called the ministration of LIFE. It is called “the ministration of the Spirit” who giveth LIFE; and “the ministration of righteousness,” which is always connected with LIFE. Christ the Head thereof is “the LIFE” — has brought “a justification unto LIFE upon all men” — has by “the gospel brought LIFE and immortality to light.”

The term ETERNAL would not alter the case; for it refers to an indefinite period, and is applied to Christ and his kingdom; though when *the end* cometh he shall surrender the kingdom to the Father, and shall himself be subject.

These terms may all be employed in an official sense. It is no uncommon thing in the scriptures to apply terms to a symbol, which properly belong to the object represented by the symbol. Thus — the believing husband *sanctifieth* the unbelieving wife, else were their children *unclean*, but now are they HOLY. Paul describes the new dispensation as the great *salvation*. This dispensation is called *the kingdom of Heaven*. Thus Melchisedek was a priest *for ever* — had neither beginning of days, nor *end of life* — and Jesus was made a priest after the power of an *endless life*, when he was made like unto this early priest. In this case an endless life is to be taken in an official sense. Thus also the Redeemer called the bread his

body, and the cup *the new testament* in his blood. And finally, in the passage under consideration, the new economy is called *regeneration*.

This view will consistently explain the Redeemer's declaration—He that believeth **HATH EVERLASTING LIFE**; and the historical record,—as many as were **ORDAINED UNTO ETERNAL LIFE**, believed; and Paul's remark,—“I was **ALIVE** without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I **DIED**.”

The other terms—what *good thing* shall I do? might also be interpreted as official. Adam, as the federal Head of the race, was called to do a *good thing*, in keeping the commandment respecting the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Noah was called to do a *good thing*, in building the ark. Abraham was called to do a *good thing*, in sacrificing his son. The Saviour was called to do a *good thing*, in becoming “obedient unto death.” All the disciples were called to do a *good thing*, in forsaking all for Christ's name's sake. In answer to his question, this *good thing* was actually prescribed to the young man himself. He would seem then to be simply inquiring after the official test of the new dispensation.

The young man, let it be remembered, was perfectly familiar with the official use of terms. For he was a **RULER**; and our scholastic refinements and scruples were not then known. Moreover, as an official man, it was not unnatural for him to seek official rank, when he contemplated a change of social position. And as he was **RICH**, he might, without cherishing any very uncommon idea, flatter himself that he would be a valuable adjuvant in the cause that interested his feelings.

I have said that the terms employed **MAY** be thus interpreted. They may be, and commonly are, very differently explained; and my comments may be considered very fanciful. But I have not yet done. Perhaps the Redeemer took them in a literal sense, when he told the youth — “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” Yet it is singular, that, when asked, to what commandments he referred, he simply enumerated those of the second table. As, though when the young man had called him *Good Master*, he had recognized that “Christ had come in the flesh,” as distinctly as that truth could then be acknowledged; and as though, when official place is sought, social character is all-important. Be that as it may, the young man himself very soon pressed the subject a step further, when he asked — “What *lack* I yet?” For what can a human being *lack*, when faith in the Redeemer is associated with the moral qualities of a sanctified man? The young man must not be censured for his answer in attestation of his own moral character. He was bearing the honorable testimony of a good conscience, as Peter did, when he said, “Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee;” or as David did, when he said, — “Thy word has made me wiser than my teachers;” or as the scriptures warrant, when they call for full assurance, instead of that unhappy state of doubt and fear, which is the product of a false humility.

But the young man demanded — what *lack* I yet? To which Jesus answered, “if thou wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast.” Here is a new term. **PERFECT** — what does it mean? It was applied to the consecration of official men. The sacrifice by which Aa-

ron was set apart to the priesthood, was the sacrifice of *perfection* — the captain of our salvation was made *perfect* through sufferings — he was *perfected* the third day — being made *perfect*, he became the author of eternal salvation. The word is applied to the “initiated,” the fully instructed, or those who were admitted to the knowledge of “the mysteries.” In the present case, the disciples, who had been chosen for the ministry, were the individuals to whom it had been “given to know the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven.” To the multitude Jesus spake in *parables*, but explained all things to his disciples. Among these disciples, so highly favoured, this young man desired to be found. As an intelligent man, capable of making accurate observation, and certainly as a *ruler*, he might have been fully apprised of these reserved privileges. The distinction implied is natural and necessary, and, like every thing else, may be, — actually has been — abused; — as I have shown in the history of early creeds.

The Redeemer proffers to place the young man in the association he desired, if he would comply with the official test required in the case. Forsake all and *follow* me, said Jesus. So he said to the fishermen — *Follow* me, and I will make you *fishers of men*. In the passage under consideration, he says — Ye which have *followed* me *in the regeneration*, shall sit on *twelve thrones, judging* the twelve tribes of *Israel*. Such was the common use of the term; and, so understood, it was uniformly connected with the *test* now required. All the disciples forsook **ALL** and followed him. On one occasion, “a certain man said unto him, **LORD**, I will *follow* thee whithersoever thou goest. And Je-

sus said unto him, the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." Are you prepared to associate with one who has *nothing*? Can you forsake *all* and choose such a lot?

"And he said unto another, *follow me*. But he said, **LORD**, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and **PREACH** the kingdom of God."—Let those who live under "the ministration of death," bury their dead: I call you into the service of the new dispensation. Forsake *all*, and go **PREACH** the gospel.

"And another said, **LORD**, I will *follow* thee: but let me first go bid them farewell that are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is *fit for the kingdom of God*." He is not prepared to forsake *all*. His affections are divided; he cannot devote himself to the kingdom of God.—Evidently the case I am analyzing is merely **OFFICIAL**. All the terms and circumstances so exhibit it. But let me proceed.

I ask, how, or in what sense, the young man was required to sell all he had, and give to the poor? It could not be as a test of personal Christianity; for, when Jesus was departing from the coast of the Gadarenes, "he who had been possessed with the devil, prayed him that he might be **WITH HIM**. Howbeit, Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." Every man, who may be restored to his right mind, or hopefully converted, as the modern phrase

is, is not therefore qualified to be a **PREACHER**; even though under the pleasing excitement of his first love he may ardently desire it. Such was the present case. The official test was not required; the man was commanded to *go home*, not to leave *all*.

The requisition now considered, cannot be the test of personal christianity; because, as such, it is contrary to the established laws of society as God himself has announced them. To "give to the poor," in the manner here prescribed, is directly opposite to the scriptural regulations themselves on that subject. The whole transaction seems to be like that of Abraham's offering his son; the command, to do which, was contrary to the ordinary laws which Jehovah had enacted. That transaction must be interpreted as the inaugurating test, to which the patriarch submitted in view of his being constituted the **FATHER** of the faithful, and the **HEIR** of the world. Besides, if to abandon all that he had was necessary to a man's personal salvation, and to keep what he had would imply his personal destruction, how could he be required to *sell*, or to *give*, to others the means of perdition? There is no case in which the rule now given, could be applied to the world at large; nor to any limited community, unless in that of persecution; as when the disciples had all things in common. And even then Ananias and Sapphira might have retained their property, had they pleased. The commentator on this passage is driven into official life, if he would advance fair and defensible principles of exegesis.

The young man could not meet the test. It does not follow that he became a reprobate. No man is to be forced into the ministry. Many a man may be

good and useful in the private walks of life, who has neither character nor efficiency to enter the ministry. Jesus imposed no commands on this young man. He was left entirely to his own volitions, and was greatly *loved*. He went away very sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

After he had retired, Jesus said — “A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven — It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” But how? what did he mean? That a rich man would hardly be personally saved at last? Surely not. For that was not the subject under consideration, as is evident, not only from what has already been considered, but from what follows. The disciples immediately asked — “who then can be *saved*?” They could not have meant *personal* salvation, or have understood that the Redeemer meant, by entering into the kingdom of heaven, *personal* salvation. For how would the argument then run: — “A *rich* man, on account of the influence of his riches, cannot be saved; therefore no one can be saved, not even “the poor,” to whom the gospel is professedly preached. Assuredly this is a complete nonsequitur. Nor, in that view, does the answer of the Redeemer seem much better; for how would it appear? to say, it may be “impossible with men” that any should be saved, if the rich are not; but “all things are possible with God;” and therefore with him it is possible that the poor should be brought home to glory, though the rich should perish. The possibility of a rich man being as good as a poor man, is never questioned in the scripture. Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, yet he

“ was Jesus’ disciple,” — “ was an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God.”

The point of the argument must be searched for in a very different direction; and is analogous to an assertion of Paul’s, that not many wise men, nor mighty, nor noble were called into the ministry. Master, the disciples would say, if the fact be as you have stated it; if no rich men are to be associated with you in your moral enterprise, how can you ever expect to succeed? who will ever be brought into such a kingdom? Can a deliverance, or salvation, or redemption for Israel, be ever effected without MONEY? — It must be remembered that the disciples supposed, until by the resurrection their eyes had been opened, that the Messiah intended to set up a temporal kingdom; that he would deliver his nation from Roman servitude; and that it was a political salvation to which they necessarily referred. And well might they ask, how the great captain should succeed? if the rich and their associates would not make common cause with him.

There is still another circumstance, belonging to this historical sketch of missionary life, which cannot be explained, except on the principle of exposition which I have set forth. On hearing his Master’s remarks, Peter observed, — “ Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore?” Thus he evidently understood the import of the preceding explanations, as applying to the official relations, in which he stood, in common with the other disciples. It is well known that they all looked for OFFICE in the kingdom, which they understood the Messiah was about to establish. Jesus replied to him — “ Ve-

rily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Official places, distinction, and employment, and those too of the most exalted kind, were to be the consequence and reward which these disciples should reap, who did the very thing that this young man was called to do. Had he complied, he might have filled the place vacated by the treachery of Judas — he might have received the commission afterwards given to Saul of Tarsus — he might have had a sphere of his own, or have been recognised as the apostle to the circumcision. Every servant of Christ has his place, and may act "according to his ability," or to the whole extent of his gifts.

The Redeemer still farther adds—"And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for MY NAME'S SAKE, shall receive an hundred fold,* and shall inherit everlasting life." All these expressions are strongly figurative, and denote a thorough revolution, which should eventually establish its own social relations, and whose associations should be EVERLASTING — using that term either symbolically or really, it matters not which. The Redeemer had made a corresponding use of this figure on another occasion. When told, that his mother and his brethren desired to speak with him, he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said — "Behold my mother and my

* Houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions.—*Mark*.

brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

All parts of this narrative evolve the same official principle. I have been obliged to crowd my comments into a narrow space. It would have been easy to have spread out the subject over a large surface, and to have afforded a more popular demonstration of the doctrine advanced. But the task would have diverted me too far from the main design of the essay.

An analogous view was afforded, when Peter drew his sword and smote off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus told him to put up his sword into its sheath; and informed him that they, who should take the sword, should perish by the sword. My kingdom is not to be established by such means. Peter had stood amazed, as all the disciples did, when the young man's case, with the Master's comments upon it, was presented to view. And now the whole thing was inexplicable to this warm-hearted, zealous, and hasty friend. He would reason with himself—I cannot understand this man. Money he has refused—on rich men he has no reliance—he will not suffer his friends to defend him—he gives himself up to his enemies—what sort of a cause is this, with which I have identified myself? It was a problem that would have startled any ecclesiastical politician. Our different hierarchies have amassed money, and wielded power; demonstrating by their whole history that Jesus was right. Even at this present day, they must have *money* to extend their denomination, and *power* to expel heretics, or they see not how it is *possible* to get along.

Thus men may reason. But God knows all things.

All means are in his hands. He commits no mistakes. His reliance is on moral influence. Of this his disciples may have a low opinion. They may not have courage to meet danger, nor patience to wait for results. But such is the policy of the mediatorial prince; and its wisdom has been demonstrated by the experiment. The rich and the powerful were not called in. A moral revolution made "the first last, and the last first;" and the twelve apostles, so small, so illiterate, so timid, sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. — Whenever rich men and ecclesiastical politicians appeared, they spoiled the whole.

Having placed my exposition of this interesting incident above the reach of fair objection, I shall gather from it the general attributes of ministerial character, of which I am in search; and remark,

1. That wealth and power and literature are secondary matters in the constitution of the ministry. When they can be obtained on correct moral views they may not be rejected. Every thing is good used lawfully. On the present occasion the master was to be made perfect through sufferings, and his disciples must partake in his baptism. Our ecclesiastical hierarchies reason differently. Like the disciples, they see not how the enterprise can be sustained by moral influence.

2. Men of moral worth — men whom he could love — the Master sought for. Those whose social character was good — who kept the second table of the law — and who could rule their own houses.

3. Men who can catch the spirit of their age, and meet all the difficulties of their office and times, — who are entirely devoted to his service, in the

form which his providence prescribes—who prefer conscience to interest, and truth before established dogmas—these he would consecrate as his servants.

The whole subject appears fair enough; one perfectly manageable; and one, in which ecclesiastical politicians have uniformly gone astray. The difficulty which the advocates of creeds suggest, is one of their own making; one which they have never been able to control; and one from which there is no escape but by returning to the ground which they have abandoned. Their tests of orthodoxy are useless and mischievous instruments, which may as well be papal as protestant, and protestant as papal; with the exception, that as protestant there is less power and more liberty, and consequently more intelligence. The PRINCIPLE of both is the same.

The argument I have now closed, might be pursued on analogous principles in relation to the admission of private members; and thereby a deal of superstition might be moved away from the church. But I have no room to pursue the illustration in that direction, and must leave it with the reader. Other parts of the general subject now claim my attention.

CHAPTER XI.

The Bible—The Human Mind.

THE inspiration of the bible,—understanding it to include the scriptures of the old and new testaments, agreeably to the protestant view—must be taken for

granted in this essay. I seek for a starting point on some common ground; and therefore assume, as commonly admitted, the apostolic declaration, — “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” If this declaration be true, it would seem to be a very fair inference, that the scriptures are competent to meet and secure their own object — whatever that object may be. If they are incompetent to meet that object, it might readily be conceded that they would acknowledge their incompetency; and prescribe some way, or point out some legislative provisions, by which their deficiencies might be supplied.

Certain it is that ecclesiastical politicians have not found the bible to be *sufficient* for the objects which they have had in view. TRADITION has occupied a very large space in the history of the church. The protestant community has brought in the doctrine, — The BIBLE is the ONLY rule of faith and practice: and then, as though they doubted the correctness of their own maxim, they have immediately turned round and formed CREEDS and CONFESSIONS OF FAITH. The modern version of the protestant maxim is — The bible is the only INFALLIBLE rule of faith and practice; and that maxim has been thus modified, as I conceive, to cover the introduction of FALLIBLE rules; and these are creeds and confessions of faith.

The controversy between the advocates of tradition and creeds, technically so called, properly viewed, is, as I understand the subject, — which of these two is the BEST? The *principle* of the two is precisely the same, and they introduce like results. The advocates of *tradition*, have a CREED — the advocates of *creeds*, are always appealing to the FATHERS. CREEDS them-

selves are *tradition* ; *i. e.* they are fragments, or systems in "regular order," of scriptural doctrines, as those doctrines were believed in other ages. If, under the system sustained by **TRADITION**, councils have convened, and if the papal power has risen under the auspices of **CREEDS**, councils still regularly assemble; and in some general synod, or assembly, or conference, or convention, the supreme power is lodged. In the protestant world we have "many Masters," while in the papal world there is but *one*. Had it not been for the division of the protestant church into sects and parties, it is exceedingly probable, that long ere now, we should have had a protestant **POPE**. And had it not been that a supreme power had been acknowledged in the papal church, which is its **UNITY**, that church had long since passed away. An entire uniformity of opinion among enlightened men, of different gifts, and differently circumstanced, is not to be looked for; unless some other views of divine truth, than have yet been received, either in the papal or protestant churches, should be presented to the consideration of the human mind.

If, under the regulation of a church sustained by *tradition*, errors in doctrine and worship have arisen, the same result has followed under the creed system. This is abundantly evident to any mind that has power enough to let go sectarian dogmas, and to compare any of the creeds with the bible: and to the mind that possesses not that power, the fact is rendered evident by the contrariety of creeds, and the controversies of sects. If papal fathers and councils have said and enacted improper things, protestant fathers and councils have erred in the same way. The parallel may be

drawn very far. If protestants have not gone to the same lengths with catholics, it is because the experiment has not been tried long enough, and the power exercised has not had a fair opportunity of extending its claims. The *principle* has been the same in both, and the question between them is, which is the *best*? The maxim that the bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice, which—whether true or not—has been asserted by *one* of these parties, yet has been practically sustained by neither. No protestant sect, in the peculiar features of its organization, can be defended by biblical statute, any more than the papal church. All are away from scriptural ground, and must retreat alike into TRADITION OR EXPEDIENCY:—The bible is the **ONLY RULE** to none of them.

Can it possibly be the duty of any man, who is under a direct allegiance to the Lord of Glory, according to the principles both of nature and grace—whose interests, for time and for eternity, depend essentially upon the formation and development of his own character—who, as a thinking being, is accountable for his personal gifts, and is required to “be fully persuaded in his own mind”—and to whom God has given a specific revelation in a popular form, with the promise of the Holy Spirit to dwell in and enlighten him—can it be the duty of any man, to turn away from that bible? to withdraw his confidence from that Spirit? and waste his time and energy in comparing “the confused multitude of creeds,” or in laboriously searching after “the unanimous consent of the fathers?” If it be impossible for either ministers or people, with but few exceptions, to engage successfully in such intellectual toil, must they take truth on

trust, and without examination? If our fathers were not able to bear such a yoke, must we bow our slavish shoulders to receive the heavy burden? And then, may it not be asked, what good shall result from such researches? Papal commentators tell us one thing — episcopal commentators tell us another thing — presbyterian commentators tell us a third thing. And certainly it may be readily conceded that one of these has good sense, and honour, and party-spirit, as well as any other of them. Nay, it would seem that the fathers themselves say very different things, and may be interpreted figuratively or literally according to the humour, or object, of the expositor. It were impossible the thing could be worse, if men had the bible put into their hands without note or comment, *i. e.* without creeds and fathers; unless indeed the *bible alone* is the promoter of anarchy and the guide to infidelity, as some have plainly enough intimated: and even then, one might inquire, — how wide is the distance between doubt and unbelief?

Protestants have said, — do away creeds, and we shall have a miserable Babel. Catholics have said, — Grant private interpretation, and the community necessarily breaks up into sects and parties, (BABEL) as the protestant church has abundantly evinced. The argument in both cases is the same in principle. The advocate of creeds meets his opponent with the same difficulties, that the catholic urges against the protestant; and whenever the protestant has effectually replied to his antagonist, he has overthrown his own system of making creeds. It is really curious to observe, that while the heresy, defended in this essay, is charged with a tendency to unitarianism, the whole

reformation has been accused of the same thing. The imputation is as good in one case as it is in the other.

That creeds have produced all sorts of doctrines, is a consequence proved by *facts*. That the abandonment of creeds, or the authority of the *bible alone*, would produce the same consequence, is an assumption which *calls* for facts. The scriptures certainly do not contradict themselves. The man, who is in the habit of reading them carefully, feels that they are not so difficult to be understood ; or that his difficulty arises from some dogmas, which he learned in early life. Jehovah calls for unity of mind, heart, and life ; rebukes divisions ; and assures us that there is but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope of our calling, and one God and Father of all ; as though he thought his own book to be a competent instrument of truth and love.— Irenæus reports that — “ The church, although scattered over the whole world, even to the extremities of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples the faith ” — and “ this faith, the church, as I said before, has received, and though dispersed over the whole world, assiduously preserves, as if she inhabited a single house ; and believes in these things, as having but one heart and one soul, and with perfect harmony proclaims, teaches, hands down, these things, as though she had but one mouth. — As the sun is one and the same throughout the whole world ; so the preaching of the truth shines every where, and enlightens all men who are willing to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Mosheim says — “ As long as the scriptures were the only rule of faith, religion preserved its native purity, and in proportion as their decisions were neglect-

ed or postponed to the inventions of men, it degenerated from its primitive and divine simplicity."

Lardner says — " In about *three hundred* years after the ascension of Jesus, without the aid of secular power, or church authority, the Christian religion spread over a large part of Asia, Europe and Africa; and at the accession of Constantine, and the convening of the Council of Nice, it was, almost every where throughout these countries, in a flourishing condition. In the space of *another three hundred* years, or a little more, the beauty of the Christian religion was greatly corrupted in a large part of that extent, its glory defaced, and its light almost extinguished. What can this be so much owing to, as to the determinations and transactions of the Council of Nice, and the measures thus set on foot, and followed in succeeding times."

Hilary, and Gregory Nazianzen, as I have shown in a former chapter, afford similar testimony.

The advocates of creeds and ecclesiastical power will thus find the facts to be directly against them; and to show that the only way to enjoy harmony, and to spread the gospel to earth's utmost bounds, is to abandon creeds and ecclesiastical councils, and return to the bible and the Spirit of God. There is more rhetoric than argument, and more dogmatism than reasoning, in the popular eulogy on creeds, and in the condemnation of the heresy that abandons them. The public take too many things for granted, because they are uttered by men whose personal character and qualifications seem entitled to their confidence; and who, no doubt, believe the views they advance.

But let the bible speak for itself. " All scripture,"

says Paul, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This is surely saying a great deal for the bible. It is an apostolic commendation. Peter says, that—"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Ought not human beings to read, to love, to study, to pray over, such a book? Has the human mind no curiosity to know what is said in such a book? Has it no anxiety to understand such a book? Will men be put off by an assertion, oft and long repeated, that they cannot understand it? May not itself teach them to understand its own doctrines? Will they take the word of a fellow-man?—and that fellow-man a partisan? May not the Holy Spirit be to them a teacher? Will they give up this blessed book? When all are engaged in controversy, will they not revert to it? When a brother exhorts and encourages them to turn to its pages, and seek truth for themselves, will they abuse his good name? throw him from their confidence and friendship? and turn him away from the communion of saints, to seek in "the wide world" a companionship for a spirit that tenderly loves the bible? Is inspiration worth no more than this? or may it be safely treated thus?

Is not nature, like the bible, the work of God? Is the one more full of difficulty than the other? May not every man look abroad upon creation and providence, and think and act for himself? Do not the heavens declare the glory of God? Does not the earth show forth his handy works? Does not day unto day utter speech? and night unto night shew knowledge? Have not their lines gone into all the earth?

and their words unto the end of the world? May not the invisible things of God be clearly seen, and be understood by the things which are made? Has not the whole heathen world been left without excuse, because that when he was thus manifested among them, they did not like to retain him in their knowledge? And yet concerning these things, one man says one thing, and another man says another thing; — one philosopher publishes one theory, and another philosopher publishes another theory. Ought men therefore to be forbidden to look upon the works of God? to know whatever they may have ability to learn? or to use whatever they may have power to employ? Ought we to have an infallible pope in science, to control human researches? councils to determine what is meant by any of the laws of nature? or philosophic creeds *authoritatively* arranging those laws “in regular order?” Because some systems are old, and have reigned over hordes and generations of slavish disciples, are they therefore right? because others are modern, are they therefore wrong? Are nature’s laws no rule to the human mind? and must private interpretation be abandoned as a vain, silly, thing, because men think, and philosophers reason, differently? Must society be broken up into sects and parties, that men who think alike about spots on the sun, phases of the moon, motions of the planets, the circulation of the blood, or modes of agriculture, may live together? What kind of a world should we have, if the principles of education and policy, adopted by papal and protestant ecclesiastics, were carried through? What kinds of government have we had, since politicians have acted on analogous principles?

I shall be told by some subtle debater of theological matters, that the parallel just drawn is not fair — that the cases are not alike — that these are different things, &c. There is more or less of that thing popularly called jesuitism, in all sects. All round controvertists take and give, as may suit themselves. If a sceptic were to attack the inspiration of the bible on account of its supposed mysteries, the theologian would immediately ask him — are there no mysteries in nature? and call upon him to explain how the least spire of grass grows? Who does not know, that the Redeemer instructed his disciples by, and that the bible is full of, such analogies? What are the rites and ceremonies, which have been adopted by any or all of the sects, but so many analogies? Transubstantiation itself cannot dispense with the principle of analogy? — I return to my question — what kind of a world should we have, if, because men have different ideas about the laws of nature, or because a great many transgressors of these laws may be found, we should award to some pope, or council, the use of our senses? allow them to make a creed for us? and neither see, nor hear, nor feel, any thing but what they shall prescribe?

But hold — has not this very thing, or something like it, been actually done. “Before the times of Galileo and Harvey the world believed in the stagnation of the blood, and the diurnal immovability of the earth; and for denying these the one was persecuted, and the other ridiculed.” — “Galileo was condemned at Rome publicly to disavow his sentiments, the truth of which must have been to him abundantly manifest. Are these then my judges? he exclaimed, in retiring from

the inquisitors, whose ignorance astonished him. He was imprisoned, and visited by Milton, who tells us, he was then poor and old. The confessor of his widow, taking advantage of her piety, perused the MSS. of this great philosopher, and destroyed such as in his *judgment* were not fit to be known to the world."

"The intelligence and the virtue of Socrates were punished with death. Anaxagoras, when he attempted to propagate a just notion of the Supreme Being was dragged to prison. Aristotle, after a long series of persecution, swallowed poison." — "Cornelius Agrippa was compelled to fly his country, and the enjoyment of a large income, merely for having displayed a few philosophical experiments, which now every school-boy can perform; but more particularly having attacked the then prevailing opinion, that St. Anne had three husbands, he was so violently persecuted, that he was obliged to fly from place to place. The people beheld him as an object of horror; and not unfrequently, when he walked, he found the streets empty at his approach. He died in an hospital." — "When Albert, usually called the GREAT, an epithet he owed to his name *De Groot*, constructed a curious piece of mechanism, which sent forth distinct vocal sounds, Thomas Aquinas was so much terrified at it, that he struck it with his staff, and to the mortification of Albert annihilated the curious labour of thirty years."

"Descartes was horribly persecuted in Holland, when he first published his opinions. Voetius, a bigot of great influence at Utrecht, accused him of ATHEISM, and had even projected in his mind to have this philosopher burnt at Utrecht in an extraordinary

fire, which, kindled on an eminence, might be observed by the seven provinces.” — “Lord Bacon, in his prophetic will, thus expresses himself: — For my name and memory, I leave it to men’s charitable speeches, and to foreign nations, and the next ages.”

It is all of a piece. The literary, political, and ecclesiastical worlds have all been alike. When men were not permitted to look on the broad face of nature for themselves, and were bound down to obey the will of stupid and vindictive despots, I do not wonder that the bible was abducted; and that even now we must not look on the biblical page, excepting as interpreted by creeds and catechisms, or as we may be permitted by some ecclesiastic. It cannot long be so. Political liberty is opening up a portal for the human mind. Philosophers, and moralists too, will be free.

It might be no uncommon thing that multitudes of private professors of Christianity should be ignorant of the value of God’s inspired book, because they may not be able to read. Breviaries, summaries, creeds, — something palpable to the eye, or easily committed to memory, — might interest and captivate them. But that intelligent and gifted men, whom Jesus commanded to teach to *every creature, all things whatsoever he had commanded*, should meet in solemn council, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in terms, so distinct and awful, call upon the Holy Ghost to inspire, or direct, them, should have framed a CREED — should have undertaken to carve the sacred volume into “regular order” — and to substitute such a manual for “the all things” which Christ had commanded, is most astonishing. This the clergy have done; and the man who will not come in submissively under their system, they

eject from their communion. On the temple doors, where such transactions are exhibited, the Spirit of judgment has written—**ICHABOD**—the glory is departed. But those who may not be able to read the bible, will not be able to read, or understand, the inscription.

I am not sure, that some protestant bishop or professor will not say to me, that the bible, in the text quoted, is merely represented as being **PROFITABLE**. What then? There is room afforded for some invention of men, less profitable, equally as profitable, far more profitable, and indispensably necessary to save the church from becoming a Babel, or sinking into unitarianism and infidelity—**WHICH?**—But let the term be taken in its popular sense. If the scripture be profitable for *doctrine*, why have we it not used for doctrine? if for reproof, why is it not employed for reproof? if for correction, why is it not the instrument of correction? if for instruction in righteousness, why is it not the actual source of instruction? It may be replied, that the scriptures **ARE** thus employed. True, with the creed as an expositor, but not without. The bible may not teach doctrine, utter reproof, undertake to correct, and offer any instruction, without permission from an ecclesiastical court. Has the apostle referred to any such restrictions? Or might not any plain, honest-minded, man, feel at liberty to read for himself? and particularly when he hears the Redeemer charge the Jews at large—“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.”

The phrase, “Man of God,” is often used as descriptive of an official person. Surely then ministers

ought to be students of the bible, and to find it profitable to furnish them unto *all good works*. Unhappily, however, the ministers and the elders, are the only ones who are called upon to subscribe the creed. Many who are proposed for the eldership object to subscription; — the people have not the creed; they know nothing about it; they never read it—a copy of it may not be found in the neighbourhood; but the minister—he cannot read straight lines in the bible; the professor in a theological seminary—he must swear most solemnly on the side of the creed. In the hands of these men, who ought to love the bible most intensely, and study it the most diligently, it is most likely to bring in unitarianism, or to dethrone the pope! How profitable the scriptures must be to these
MEN OF GOD!

After all, what is the scriptural use of the term **PROFITABLE**? The same apostle informs us, that the Jewish dispensation was done away because of its **UNPROFITABLENESS**: *i. e.* It could not take away sin; it was not able to cleanse the conscience of the worshipper. As a typical system it was **PROFITABLE**, for it served its purpose; beyond that purpose it was **UNPROFITABLE**, because it could accomplish nothing more. The scripture, given by inspiration of God, is **PROFITABLE** for certain things. Of course it is competent to accomplish those things. These things are **DOCTRINE, REPROOF, CORRECTION, INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, THOROUGHLY FURNISHING THE MAN OF GOD UNTO ALL GOOD WORKS**. Now to accomplish these very things, for which the scriptures are declared to be so sufficient and ample, **CREEDS** have been framed, throwing doctrines into **REGULAR ORDER**, and

furnishing TESTS OF ORTHODOXY. It is in this connexion, that we are told the scriptures are UNPROFITABLE, seeing that the most corrupt, as well as the most excellent, will bear them as a TEST; and seeing that they will divide the church into sects and parties, as the protestant church, with all her fragments of papal philosophy and discipline, has abundantly evinced. I pray the reader honestly to ask himself—in what way are the scriptures profitable, under such misgivings and regulations? Which is best?—protestant or papal provisions? The last may have the greatest variety and the most magnificence of forms; and the ignorant, like the church during her childhood, or non-age, may love such things. It may not, possibly, be very hard to persuade protestants to become catholics; for when their CREEDS are gone, what shall they do with an UNPROFITABLE bible?—Is this the reason of the fear I have so often heard expressed? Let protestants then return to the bible, and trust their Master. His Spirit will lead them and their people into all truth.

I have remarked, that the advocates of the great protestant maxim seem to think it to be very equivocal; for though they stoutly defend it in controversy with those who may not be immediately attached to their own party, they certainly do not carry it out in their own sectarian connexion. They have another law for the regulation of their own ecclesiastical family; and it is very certain that the bible has not enacted all the peculiarities of all the sects. The thing is impossible; notwithstanding each sect does most confidently appeal to the bible. It may, perhaps, be worth while to ascertain the place which the bible is

intended to occupy, by analyzing the protestant maxim itself.

On what ground is the bible a rule at all? All human beings are not without law to God, but are under law to Christ. The annunciation of the first promise of a Saviour, placed all mankind under the mediatorial institute. The public order, thus given, has, at no time, been recalled. If this be so, all mankind are under the mediatorial institute. The bible then becomes obligatory on the human conscience, because it is **THE WORD OF GOD**—the commandment given by the Lord from heaven. If this be the reason, it will follow, that any other commandment of his, which may be addressed to a human being, is equally obligatory. Is there any other commandment? The reader will please distinctly to embrace this question; because its answer may lead to an important conclusion.

For the present I shall confine my argument to the old testament. There was a time when not a single page of the old testament had been written. Moses is sent after many ages and generations had passed away, and was the first to introduce into the world a written book, as inspired from heaven. The word of the Lord came by Moses. What was the law before Moses came? The word of the Lord came to Abraham; what was the law before Abraham's day? The word of the Lord came to Noah; what was the law before the flood? Could the word which came to Moses be a rule to Abraham? or that which came to Abraham be a rule to Noah? or that which came to Noah, be a rule to Enoch? And when the Mosaic law was perfected, was it a rule to other nations than the Jews? or now that its obligation has expired, is it

a rule to us? Was the law before Moses evangelical? or that before Abraham? or that before Noah? All these matters are entitled to serious consideration, and propose, what may be, a popular difficulty, in somewhat of a novel form.

In endeavouring to explain the matter involved in these various questions, I will take an apostle for my guide. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, observes that, — “As many as have sinned *without law*, shall also perish *without law*: and as many as have sinned *in the law*, shall be judged *by the law*; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ. according to my *gospel*.” Here then is a difference between being *in the law*, and *without the law*; and a difference distinctly recognized at the bar of the judge: for they who have sinned in the law, shall be judged not *without law*, but *by the law*; and they who have sinned without law, shall perish, not *in the law*, but *without law*. Yet both are to be judged by Jesus Christ, and according to the *gospel*.

How then stands the fact? The Jew made his boast of the LAW. He was therefore under the law. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had not *the law*; yet, says the apostle, “they do *by nature*, the things contained in the law;” and “these, having not the law, *are a law unto themselves*; which show the work of the law *written on their hearts*, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another. If *the law*, given by Moses, had not been enacted, the Jews would have done *by nature* the things contained in the law, and would have shown it to be *written on their hearts*. When the law was enacted, the Jew did not lose what he possessed

before in common with the Gentile. He retained it all; and being taken out of a state which is described as **NATURE**, he was put into a state which is called **ELECTION**; and to the election **THE LAW** was given. The old testament, or "the oracles of God," was a specific rule to the **ELECTION**, awarding their peculiar privileges, and prescribing their peculiar duties: and it was a rule to none else. Yet the Jews were not prohibited from studying the laws of nature, and diving as deep into philosophy as either their ability or their opportunity enabled them to do. The philosophy of *nature* is not opposed to evangelic truth. There was then no such idea, as that which appears to be very common now, that the heavens and the earth display nothing of an evangelic character. No reason was then assigned why a human being should not acquire truth wherever it was to be found, and regulate himself accordingly. Solomon's mind ranged over all the Creator's works, and transcribed on the biblical page whatever he learned; and many a heathen philosopher uttered ideas and advanced doctrines, whose influence is felt in the Christian church at this day. But when you refer to the election, or to their particular position and responsibilities, their standard was *the law*, or the old testament scriptures. These were Jehovah's word, or oracles, to them, in connexion with their official privileges and duties; and these advantages were very great, as Paul declares.

It is here to be distinctly observed, that when the Saviour came into the world, the Jews had corrupted their institute by **TRADITION**, and made void the law of God by **THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN**. Yet they talked very enthusiastically about Abraham and Mo-

ses, and about the law and the sabbath; had the old testament read to them every sabbath, honoured the priesthood, and carefully observed the commanded sacrifice. They, however, did not know the Saviour when he came, taught false maxims of social life, misunderstood the scriptures, were divided into sects, — one saying one thing, and another saying another thing, about “the oracles of God” and their doctrines — and finally crucified the blessed Saviour. And though he called upon them, notwithstanding their sectarian and philosophic divisions — divisions which were palpable enough, while yet they gloried in their Mosaic UNITY — though, I say, he called upon them, notwithstanding their contentions and traditions, to SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, yet he could not recover them. The wisdom of his doctrines they acknowledged, and yet resisted him; his miracles they saw, and yet rejected him. The disciples followed under his commission, but were obliged to turn to the gentiles. Such an unhappy state of the public mind was not suddenly produced. The “commandments of men” came in by degrees; “traditions” beginning, perhaps no one could tell where, were accumulated with the growing corruptions; judgment was not speedily executed; but as it had been promised that the Jewish dispensation should not run out until Shiloh should come, even the enormous infidelity of the priesthood, could not make the promise without “effect.” The whole spirituality of the divine institute seems to have been merged in a series of *political* calculations; yet the Saviour came, as God had declared by the prophets.

A parallel argument may be drawn out in relation to

the new testament. Christ came to set up "the kingdom of heaven." A second ELECTION was proposed in the divine will. The gentiles, who had the law *written on their heart*, and who did *by nature*, the things contained in the law, were now brought in. God had manifested among them that which may be known of him; the invisible things of him, even his eternal power and Godhead, could be clearly seen by them, being understood by the things which are made; and his providence ever preserved his "witness" among them. The promise given to Noah, that the world should no more be destroyed by a flood, was fulfilled, notwithstanding the wickedness into which they had fallen. And now, when separated in their turn to be "the people of God," they lost nothing which was their privilege by *nature*, or which belonged to their constitution as intellectual beings. The "election" brought them new privileges — an advantage every way — but chiefly this, "that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

It seems, however, that *nature* is represented as worth but little, and to teach nothing evangelical. Nature is often exhibited as opposed to revelation. The moralist who talks about nature is immediately suspected of infidelity. Sceptics themselves accuse the bible of being contrary to nature, and for this reason throw off all the peculiarities of the dispensation of mercy and forbearance under which they live. Learned men have been treated like Satanic emissaries; and philosophy is supposed to be entirely out of place, when employed as an adjuvant to Christianity. And this idea, which makes philosophy so suspicious a matter, has been appended to the protestant maxim

that "the bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice," or has been employed as an illustration of that maxim. And if this be the sense in which controvertists advance it, then I aver for myself that it is not true, either when the bible is declared to be the **ONLY** rule, or the only **INFALLIBLE**, rule. For both Jesus and his disciples did appeal to nature, as any moralist may do now, with confidence and effect. Those, who, in the present day have not the new testament, are in a relation to the Christian community, technically so called, like that in which the old gentiles, who had not the law, stood to the Jews. **NATURE** is a term descriptive of the world under the mediatorial institute. The righteousness of faith was proclaimed to Adam — Noah was its **HEIR** — Abraham, who exemplified it, was the heir of the world — and the bible was intended to set it forth. Nature and the election evolve the same essential principles; and any definition of the bible, as an instrument of government, which shuts out nature as having no influence on, or connexion with, evangelic responsibilities, is necessarily inaccurate.

But if the bible is asserted to be the *only* rule, or the only *infallible* rule, to the **CHURCH** as such, in opposition to **TRADITION**, and the **COMMANDMENTS OF MEN**, then I readily admit its truth. If I should be asked for my proof, I should answer, that tradition, and the commandments of men were most pointedly and positively rejected by the Redeemer; and for this special reason, that they made void the *law of God*, given in the scriptures. Accordingly the protestant maxim was brought in at a time, when tradition and creeds and councils had run away with the human mind, and had corrupted the church. Take away the old testament and no act of hu-

man authority can sustain the Jewish church. An election, by which form and offices and ordinances, other than those which belonged to nature, were given to the Jewish nation, must occur by divine authority; and the fact of that authority being exercised was established by MIRACLES, or works which betokened that the Lord himself uttered the command which separated that people for himself. Take away the word of truth which came by Jesus Christ and was repeated by his disciples, which was established by miracles and was at last written in the new testament, and there is no authority by which the Christian church exists. All the ordinances, offices and privileges, which are peculiar to this community constituted by a second election, owe their origin to the prescriptions belonging to the new covenant. Christians have no more right to interfere with their priesthood or ordinances, than the Jews had with theirs. They who do interfere with these things, and then plead, in favour of what they have done, tradition, the fathers, councils, &c. are in the very same situation in which our Lord found the Jews, and which he reprobated in such unqualified terms.

This new covenant, by which the new "election" was constituted, or by which "the kingdom of heaven" was set up, was proclaimed by the Son of God himself, as far as his hearers were "able to bear." His disciples, to whom he committed the work of carrying on what he had begun, were more minute in their explanations. As Paul describes the process — "The great salvation first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was afterwards confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing witness, both with

signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." These disciples, as Peter declares for himself, "endeavour'd" that the church might "be able" after their "decease" to have the truths which had been taught "always in remembrance." To accomplish this object, instead of leaving those truths to be handed down by **TRADITION**, they committed them to writing, and embodied them in certain ordinances which had been delivered to them. While this process was going on, every step the disciples took was confirmed by divine authority. God was their witness. Nothing was equivocal. At the same time great forbearance was extended to the Jews, and Jewish ceremonies appear not unfrequently mingled with Christian ordinances.

Under the old testament, when any thing new was appended to the institutions which Moses had given, Jehovah was consulted and his decision was obtained. The monarchy was not established without his consent. Every prophet proved himself to be a bearer of a divine message by a **MIRACLE**, while the ordinary priesthood and elders came in under the action of the established laws of the dispensation. When then, as historians report to us, and as facts compared with the bible abundantly manifest, ecclesiastics **CHANGED** the whole face of the church and gave it a **NEW FORM**, it behoved them to have a "Thus saith the Lord," for what they did; and to exhibit a **MIRACLE**, or a multitude of miracles, in support of their pretensions. Protestants are perfectly right in taking this ground in controversy with catholics; presbyterians are perfectly right in taking this ground in controversy with episcopalians; independents are per-

fectly right in taking this ground in controversy with presbyterians; and anti-creed men take this ground in controversy with the advocates of creeds. A "Thus saith the Lord," brethren, if you please. MIRACLES in behalf of your ecclesiastical measures, we demand. The POPE—the episcopal *diocesan*—the presbyterian minister as distinct from the *elder*—the presbytery—the synod, or conference, or convention—name and thing, where is the "Thus saith the Lord," uttered by some PROPHET, performing a miracle in attestation of his commission?

It is worthy of farther remark, that the MIRACLES of the Lord and his disciples were wrought in the presence of the PEOPLE. If the proof was presented to them, of course the things to be proved were distinctly stated. Of what use could the proof be, if such was not the fact? Publicity, in truth, was one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the Master's course and doctrine. "There is," said he, "nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad."—"What I tell you in darkness; that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the house tops." This secret policy—these mysterious movements—this hiding of biblical doctrines—formed no part of his official proceedings. Such operations he left to his enemies, who, being guided by traditions and the commandments of men, did not know how to act an open, guileless, and generous part. Ambition moulded not his career; plot and stratagem belonged not to his official transactions; and any proposition to act on sinister motives, or to seek power which did not belong to him, he indignantly

frowned from his presence. Never did the ministry of reconciliation act more unworthy of their commission, or more unlike their Master, than when they took the bible from the people; filled their minds with abstract metaphysical dogmas, instead of plain scriptural truth; and acquired the art of managing the public by secret influence. Ministers ought to be the light of the world — the gospel is not a candle put under a bushel.

The conclusion, which I have reached, is simply this: — that the bible is the only rule for the peculiarities of “the election.” It develops the great principles of the mediatorial institute; and, including within itself whatever belongs to NATURE, it goes farther — is a special revelation and rule to those who are under it, and points out the line in which Jehovah has fulfilled the various prophetic declarations he had made. But it is not at war with philosophy, nor does it forbid any man to study, or to understand, or to make use of, the word of God expressed in any other form. It is here that popes, and councils, and creeds, and confessions of faith interfere with the peculiar prerogative of the BIBLE. They create an election within “the election,” and appoint officers and enact laws for those who fall within their own election, while they appropriate the ordinances and offices which Christ has established for his “election.” Accordingly we have now, as in the winding up of the former economy, TRADITION and the COMMANDMENTS OF MEN, while no man dare to take the bible for the ONLY RULE to the CHURCH, AS SUCH. NATURE was not the rule to the Jewish, nor is it the rule to the Christian, dispensation. The offices and ordinances of each, were appointed

solely by the covenants under which they respectively originated. Thus these things ought to be considered now : but mankind may obstinately determine to live under the direction of creeds, till the hour of judgment shall come.

In defence of this system, it has been pretended, as in the definition already considered, that in creeds scriptural doctrines are put into "regular order." Surely this must be presumptuous in the highest degree. Is the disciple greater than his Lord? Is it not enough for him to be as his Lord? Did the Jews, by tradition and the commandments of men, mend the national polity which Jehovah had established? Or teach their children divine truth in a better way? Or did they not make void the law of God? And have not the abstract propositions of a creed, or catechism, broken up the very associations in which divine truth was placed? and by which the Holy Ghost was pleased to illustrate that truth?

The reader has no doubt heard the student complain, that, after returning from a walk, he found his study swept and cleaned, and all his books and papers put "in order." But alas, every thing was out of order for him. In this way ecclesiastics sometimes "cleanse the sanctuary." Every thing is put "in order;" but it is not "the due order of the sanctuary." The PEOPLE find not scriptural doctrines as ministers arrange them. The ministers themselves disagree, and every sect has its own "order." Here it was where my own troubles, so far as scriptural doctrines are concerned, commenced. It was with no small surprise I discovered, that truth stood in one connexion in the confession of faith, and in another

connexion in the bible ; and researches, which I had supposed myself to have closed, were to be recommenced, and with a guide that I had before seen only in a mask ; but which now came forth undisguised in form, and imperative in tone. The man who has been in this situation, and has bowed to the mandate to follow this guide, thus unmasked, knows what is meant by the above disclosure. None other can appreciate it. And HE knows that scriptural doctrines are any thing else than “in regular order” in a CREED.

But in estimating the comparative merits of moral doctrines in a scriptural form, and in “the regular order” of a creed, it is to be remembered that the question involves the character of an instrument of education. The human *mind* is to be instructed ; and not one mind, but many minds, with a great variety of power, and under great variety of circumstances.—Which is best for such a purpose ? a compend of abstract propositions ; or a manual sustained by all the popularity which living circumstances can give it ? a volume which mingles facts with doctrines ; or that which offers naked metaphysics ? a book which is known to be inspired of God ; or that which originates in human authority ? Which is most likely to excite thought, interest the feelings, or secure obedience ? Let me throw this subject into different forms.

1. Every individual is called to *think*. The secret of education is wanting, when this object is not sought nor attained. Every man must be fully persuaded in his own mind ; must have the kingdom of God set up in his own heart ; must be personally regenerated and sanctified through the truth ; and must be prepared to give in an account for himself. Nor is that all. Ev-

every man has his own peculiar gift of God. All are not alike. Some have ten talents, some have five, some have two, and some have one. Each one must act according to his ability, and account for whatever he has personally received. No pope, nor council, of any size or pretensions, can possibly regulate society thus constituted, provided they all *think*. In such a case, they will and must be free. God alone can govern them. UNITY under these circumstances will be "the unity of the Spirit." Any other unity, whether the result of arbitrary power, or of social compact, is giving a stone to a child when he asks for bread — a serpent for a fish — a scorpion for an egg. Spiritual death ensues, as all history testifies.

This matter is very happily wrapped up in FAITH, without which it is impossible to please God. For mark — what is faith? Is it not the belief of that which we know? How can a man believe in him, of whom he has not heard? Is not faith a belief of the testimony of God? and how can a man believe that of which he is utterly ignorant? Paul has beautifully illustrated this subject, when stating the practical operation of faith, he remarked — "Faith is the *substance*, or subsistence, of things hoped for, and the *evidence* of things not seen." The exercise of believing creates in the mind the subsistence of things hoped for, which, without believing would not exist in the mind; the exercise of believing affords to the mind the evidence of things not seen, the evidence of which the mind has not without believing. To illustrate by analogy — The man who thinks does, by the very process of thinking, receive into his mind the subjects of which he *thinks*; and without thinking he never

can get those subjects 'into his mind. It is by thinking he perceives their evidence, and without thinking he cannot perceive their evidence. Were the objects presented to him to be recognised by the eye, then by seeing he would have them subsisting in his mind; by seeing he would obtain their evidence. Men learn to know and *do* things by *doing them*. Hence the Redeemer told the Jews — "If any man will *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it comes from heaven, or whether I speak of myself." So it is with faith. By believing, men learn to believe. The objects of their belief are thus brought to exist in their own mind, and are surrounded with the vivid evidence of truth. Manifestly then the great object in religious education, and the very import of faith, is the illumination and discipline of each individual mind. The philosophy of morals, in this view, is the philosophy of all science.

How then is this object to be gained? Would you take away truth from the mind which you wish to know truth? or the testimony of God from the man whom you would induce to believe that testimony? Would you substitute something else? and not suffer an inquirer, like the Bereans of old, to examine the scriptures, whether that substitute be accurate? Did Jesus, who appealed to his works, preach thus? or did he tell his hearers to search the scriptures? Did Paul preach thus? or did he send epistle after epistle? and charge his readers to look well to their condition, that their faith might stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God? When these substitutes are provided, is there no danger that the wisdom of men will

take the place of the power of God? When scriptural doctrines are detailed "in regular order," for the purpose of easy and accurate learning, will not the bible, — where these doctrines are supposed not to be "in regular order," and which must therefore require more labour to comprehend, — be neglected and unstudied? Cannot those, who talk so much about "total depravity," see the probable consequence of their own project? Nay, at this day, are not the doctrines of creeds far better known, than the contents of the bible? — I appeal to any man, who is at all acquainted with the Christian community, whether the technical terms of scholastic theology do not make up the vocabulary of both ministers and people? and their meaning, the subject of preaching and of controversy?

How is the object in view to be gained? By force? Can you compel men to think — to believe — to love — to hope? Did ecclesiastical power ever enlighten, convince, or sanctify one immortal mind? Did Christ adopt this method? Did his disciples pursue, or recommend, such a course? What does God mean by the phrase — "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit?" How rapidly would men make philosophers, in this way? Shall we whip children into the fear of God? What has ecclesiastical power ever done in the world? excepting to aid the civil arm, or compel the civil arm to aid it, in degrading the human mind to the lowest state of ignorance and bondage? Look abroad over the world — read its history — and decide.

How is the object in view to be gained? Would you call from the lofty pinnacle of knowledge to every passing stranger — "Come up hither," — after having

drawn up the ladder, by which you reached the pinnacle yourself? or, which is the same thing, would you teach abstract propositions without showing how you arrived at them? If not, — if you must show the way by which you reached them, what is the use of the compend, which describes not the way? Assuredly the bible is not constructed as a sectarian creed is. God, in instructing the human mind, has adopted a very different course, having furnished it with a popular book, and employed men to address it, not with fixed scholastic formalities, but under the full flow of sympathies most highly excited. The scholastic exercises he has identified with a father's anxieties, with a mother's feelings, and with domestic scenes. This thing called a CREED Jehovah never made; but has sought to teach the human mind according to its own characteristics, and by agencies belonging to its own essential relations. As a popular instructor of mind, of varied mind, of mind in various countries and ages, never was there a book, on pure philosophical principles, to be compared with the bible. The time is at hand, when it shall take its own proper place, and be hailed from the rising to the setting sun, as the world's guide to everlasting glory.

2. The human mind is called to hold direct communion with God. Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God?" How then shall the mind hold communion with a being who is not permitted to speak to us? whose word we are not permitted to hear? and whom, it is said, we cannot understand? Or if, when God speaks to us,

his sentences are not properly arranged, and his sentiments not in proper order, so as to suit ignorant men, or those who may not agree with each other in opinion, how can we have fellowship with him when he speaks? Is it not strange that intelligent men should withdraw, or practically supersede, the bible under such circumstances? Yet, what else can be made, either of papal or protestant movements in relation to this subject?

But then it will be said that there are great difficulties in the bible, and that the general mind cannot remove, or explain them. There are difficulties about every thing, and therefore it is that men must learn to *think*. The child comprehends but little, when it first begins to learn. Every science presents a similar aspect to every disciple. Yet to acquire things by rote, and rapidly recite the scientific creed of some preceptor, is the poorest system of education that ever was devised, and betrays as much the ignorance of the teacher as that of the pupil. How many understand the works of nature? How many can furnish a detail of astronomical science? Shall the ignorant therefore not be permitted to look abroad upon the Almighty's works? In fact, when the controvertist states these difficulties, he is furnishing the reason why the bible should be constructed as it is. It demands inquiry; it calls for thought; it presents a great variety of view; that every mind may catch something, and each commence at a spot, where it has discovered that which appears to be most suitable to itself. The uniformity, to which creeds pretend, disregards this variety of mind, and cannot adapt itself to every man's peculiarity.

Mr. Erskine, in his "remarks on the internal evidence for the truth of revealed religion," has very happily described this matter. He says—"Most people in this country, (Britain) and probably even the majority of the population in Europe, think that they understand Christianity ; and yet a very small proportion of them have read the bible with that degree of ordinary attention, which they bestow upon the common concerns of life. Their ideas on this subject are derived almost entirely, from creeds and catechisms, and church articles, or human compositions of some kind. The evil consequences arising from this, are most grievous — To convince ourselves that they are indeed so, to a high degree, we have only to compare the two methods.

——"In the bible, the Christian doctrines are always stated in this connexion: They stand as indications of the character of God, and as the exciting motives of a corresponding character in man. Forming thus the connecting link between the character of the Creator and the creature, they possess a majesty which it is impossible to despise, and exhibit a form of consistency and truth, which it is difficult to disbelieve. Such is Christianity in the BIBLE; but in CREEDS and CHURCH ARTICLES, it is far otherwise. These tests or summaries, originated from the introduction of doctrinal errors and metaphysical speculations into religion; and in consequence of this, they are not so much intended to be the repositories of truth, as barriers against the encroachment of erroneous opinions. The doctrines contained in them therefore are not stated with any reference to their great object in the bible,—the regeneration of the human

heart, by the knowledge of the divine character. They appear as detached propositions, indicating no moral cause, and pointing to no moral effect. They do not look to God, on the one hand, as their source ; nor to man, on the other, as the object of their moral urgency. They appear like links severed from the chain to which they belonged ; and thus, they lose all that evidence which arises from their consistency, and all that dignity which is connected with their high design.”

Another late writer, — for writers of this description appear to be multiplying, and in quarters where they were not looked for — has very beautifully observed : — “ It may not be improper to remark, that the religion, to whose characteristics I have adverted, is not to be considered as precisely that form of Christianity which has been established in Italy, in Germany, in Russia, or in Britain ; or as it is professed by episcopalians, presbyterians, independents, or any other sect ; or as it is expounded in the catechisms, confessions, or systems of divinity, which have been published by the different denominations of the Christian world. In all these cases, its true glory has been obscured, its beauty defaced, and its purity contaminated, by passing through the atmosphere of human folly and corruption ; and opinions and practices have been incorporated with its leading principles, altogether repugnant to the liberal and expansive spirit for which it is distinguished. **IT IS TO THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE BIBLE ALONE TO WHICH I REFER.** It is there alone that it is to be seen in its native purity, simplicity, and glory ; and he who neglects to study the scriptures, unfettered by the trammels of human sys-

tems, will never be able fully to perceive, or to appreciate the true excellence of that religion, which is 'pure, and peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits,' and which breathes 'good will towards men.' For, in some of the forms which Christianity has assumed in certain countries, it has been so much blended with human inventions as to be scarcely distinguishable from heathenism; and consequently in such cases, it has seldom been accompanied with those beneficial effects, which it is calculated to produce. And, among almost all the sectaries in every country, either some of its distinguishing features have been overlooked, or its doctrines mixed up with metaphysical dogmas, or its practical bearings disregarded, or opinions respecting its forms and circumstantialia set in competition with its fundamental truths and moral requisitions. 'Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure'—and the divine fabric of Christianity will remain unshaken and unimpaired, so long as the scriptures are preserved uncontaminated and entire."*

All this is true, and evinces the bible itself to be the best instrument of instructing the human mind: while creeds can pretend to no such pre-eminent utility. In fact they cannot, if the above views of them be true, ever keep out error; for how can they banish error, if they are not able to teach truth? and offer no inducement to holiness? They operate precisely on the old principle adopted by the heathen priesthood, which Paul describes when he says—"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed THE GLORY of the incorruptible God into an image

* Dick, on the improvement of Society, &c. pp. 293—'4.

made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things." The difficulties of which ecclesiastics complain, they have introduced themselves. For while the bible is commensurate with the varieties of the intellectual world, and meets every man, according to his own peculiarity, just as the physical system does, creeds cannot instruct, or adapt themselves to, this varied mind; but on the contrary, convert even their framers into so many combatants to teach the Christian community how to quarrel and divide. And all this is done by parties, who are so anxious for a close and intimate communion with God himself, that they declare—the one, that the bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice, and that the sinner is converted by the *power* of God;—and the other, that the bread and wine, in the ordinance of the supper, become the real body and blood of Jesus Christ. The bible is the *only* rule, and yet we must have a creed—we may eat Christ's *flesh*, and yet may not read his *bible*. Marvellous theology!

But I shall be told, that Jehovah has himself appointed ministers to instruct the people. True. All societies have official men. Religion is a social matter, and organized communities must have their own agents for the production of social results. Yet the object of the ministry is, to keep the BIBLE before the minds of men—to divide the word of truth—to teach all things which Christ has commanded—and he has promised to be with them to the end of the world. But creeds do not exhibit the word of truth. They proclaim the supposed unanimous consent of the fathers, or the decisions of the pope, or the de-

crees of councils, or the doctrines of a sect, and have no promise of the Spirit's presence and aid. They refer not to God as their author, nor to the sanctification of man as their object. They bring in ecclesiastical power, which the Master and his disciples most solemnly prohibited, and can do nothing but distract and debase the human mind. Let the reader look for "regular order" through the whole Christian church, and find it if he can. Let him go back to the council of Nice, and listen to trinitarian and unitarian combatants; and look at bishops, so celebrated for their learning and their piety, as they cast their mitres at the feet of a hypocritical emperor, or receive them again with the inscription of their new vassalage:—Let him trail his melancholy steps through the middle ages, and look for "the brightness of glory" amid scenes of darkness and deeds of blood:—Let him now catch from every passing breeze the summons of ecclesiastical strife, and distinguish the high tones of idolized leaders,—of legions marshalled under the pope, or the different sects of reformers; and then tell where "regular order" is, in either doctrines or social virtues?

And after all, when the creed system has done such fearful things, and through so many ages; when at the present day, scarcely a church court can meet without bitter contention, and parties, full of animosity, have risen, or are rising, in each denomination,—when religious newspapers have become the vehicles of religious controversy, and religious society seems to be dissolving; will not men see, will not the saints of the Lord, abandon, the cause of this wide-spreading degeneracy? and seek for order and harmony,

peace and truth, in the bible, which God himself gave them? Shall men who take this view, and adopt this course, still be driven out of the church? Then God grant, that our ecclesiastics may have cases every day multiplying on their hands, until the Christian community shall itself be roused to understand, why this whirlwind is sweeping through the Christian empire. May the Lord arise to staunch the bleeding wounds his own servants have inflicted, and wake up Zion to put on her beautiful garments. The Lord reigns, and in him alone can troubled hearts confide.

CONCLUSION.

I HAVE NOW, the second time, reviewed the creed system. In behalf of the general argument, catholic, lutheran, episcopalian, and presbyterian witnesses have been summoned, with others of high literary character and standing. An appeal has been made to every man, who may please to read history, or to look at events transpiring around him. Many other witnesses might have been called upon, whose testimony would have been equally clear, and the argument might have been much extended. But enough has been done. My reader may, perhaps, be offended with my freedom and severity. If so, two suggestions, which I freely make, may deserve his attention. If the essay is merely the echo of truth, then his offence, however much I may regret it, is no concern of mine. If truth has not been maintained, I trust I shall be ever open to conviction. Free from the

grasp of church courts, and apprehending nothing, personally, from their high-handed measures, I would honestly declare my thoughts, but would not use my liberty as "a cloak of maliciousness." I covet controversy with no ecclesiastic of any name; nor the notice of any reviewer, who may be confident of his own ability to put the public straight. All I desire is the promulgation of truth with the Master's blessing; and that every man may have full liberty to declare truth, according to the wisdom given unto him, and the opportunities which providence may associate with his duties.

Perhaps it may be asked — what is now to be done? To which I answer, that free and untrammelled DISCUSSION, aiming at truth, guided by the fear of the Lord, and sustained by love to men, is every thing in Jehovah's intellectual empire. Such liberty is necessarily connected with individual responsibility, and the proper exercise of mind. The power that interferes with it is tyrannical, and the man who submits to such an act of power is not evangelically free. The community may not be prepared for this discussion, though they are approaching it. Controversy must wake up the papal church to thought and inquiry, and her members must know that her dogmas may be examined. The PEOPLE must learn their *rights*, as governors in ecclesiastical associations, instead of submitting to the infallibility of synodical assemblies. All this may require time. In the mean while, he who desires to think for himself, and the church which determines to sustain him, must take the troubles which such a case involves; and, as Jesus loved them and gave himself for them, they must, with cheerfulness

and a good conscience, endure hardness as good soldiers, for his NAME's sake. Instead of avenging their own wrongs, they must bear their faithful testimony to truth ; and leave the church courts that may seek to distract and divide, to the retributive process which hard measures and vindictive cruelty are sure to incur.

Peter violated the principles of "the kingdom" of heaven, when he drew his sword, and cut off the ear of the high-priest's servant. "They who take the sword, shall perish with the sword," said the Redeemer, who would "not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." "Vengeance is mine, I will recompense, saith the Lord." "The servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." And it will be well, if they who advocate, and they who reject, creeds and confessions of faith, shall act in this manner, walking by the same rule, and minding the same thing, as far as they have attained. Then, if in any thing else they be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto them. May the good Lord thus teach and bless and reconcile all who love his glorious name.

If my voice may be heard among the advocates of ecclesiastical liberty, and particularly by young men who may be attracted by the grandeur and magnificence of the glorious cause ; I would affectionately counsel, and earnestly exhort, them to remember, that it devolves on them to "speak the truth in LOVE." The degrading scenes which have been too often exhibited in church courts, the embittered and undignified discussions of religious newspapers, in both of

which a supposed heretic is treated with so much unmanly and undeserved vituperation, must not be imitated by the "freemen of the Lord." Liberty ought as much to elevate, as ecclesiastical despotism degrades, both personal and official character. The cause disowns every thing that is vulgar, jesuitical, or dogmatic; and warrants no transactions of which an honorable minded man should be ashamed, or concerning which he should remark, as creed-men sometimes do in reference to their synods, and as Gregory did of old, — I am glad I was not there. No apostle was ever ashamed of the gospel — every one gloried in the cross, and rejoiced that he was counted **WORTHY** to suffer for Christ's sake.

These young men I would address, as the Lord addressed his disciples — "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you." I would write, as Peter wrote — "Beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partaker's of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but

let him glorify God on this behalf. **FOR THE TIME IS COME THAT JUDGMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD.**—But, and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

I earnestly counsel my young friends, that they be exceedingly careful of their **PERSONAL CHARACTER**: Your backslidings will be attributed, whether true or false, to the cause you have espoused; and none will be more ready to forget that “charity which covereth a multitude of faults,” than controvertists, whose censure you may have incurred. A contest for “the faith once delivered to the saints,” is identified, not only with ecclesiastical penalties, however cruelly inflicted, but with a thousand rumours too remorselessly uttered, and a thousand letters too deliberately written, and a thousand newspaper paragraphs irresponsibly published. Take heed to yourselves that, none of these things be deserved. An enlightened community will unhesitatingly fling from its confidence, the man whose unholy life, or whose unhallowed passions, shall violate his promises, and disappoint their expectations. I say again, take heed to your ways. Let **FAITH**, which I have shown the creed-system to have abandoned, be the distinguishing characteristic of your official course, and a **HOLY LIFE** the luminous proof of your moral excellence. Your

happiness and your recompense must be found in the service you render, and in the approbation of the Lord, who passed through like scenes to his cross. May that Lord bless and keep you.

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